

# Bangladesh



## A Legacy of Blood

Anthony Mascarenhas

# BANGLADESH

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Anthony Mascarenhas



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To Yvonne  
and our children—  
who also have  
paid the price

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## Acknowledgements

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## Preface

This is a true story; in many ways a text book of Third World disenchantment.

On the 16th of December, 1971, the state of Bangladesh (population 70,000,000) was born at the end of a nine-month liberation struggle in which more than a million Bengalis of the erstwhile East Pakistan died at the hands of the Pakistan army. But one of the 20th century's great man-made disasters is also among the greatest of its human triumphs in terms of a people's will for self-determination. The united upsurge of the Bengalis to fashion their own destiny against overwhelming odds captured the imagination of the world. It brought with it an unprecedented outpouring of sympathy and aid from the international community. This ranged from active political and practical support to touching individual acts of generosity and the Concert for Bangladesh by pop stars in New York in 1971 which became the model for Band Aid and Live Aid relief to starving Africa. But the Bengalis gave more than anyone else: their lives in staggering numbers. Those were sacrificed to make a reality of the long-cherished dream of Sonar Bangla or Golden Bengal. This was intended to be a state based on equity, justice, social harmony and cultural effulgence, echoing the sentiments dear to the heart of every Bengali. But it was not to be. The sacrifices were in vain. The dream became a nightmare. Bangladesh got snarled in a legacy of blood.

Few men in history have betrayed the aspirations of their people as did the first leaders of Bangladesh—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed and General Ziaur Rahman. When each in turn was called upon to make good, he took the country further along the road to perdition. Once the darling of the independence movement 'in whose magic name all things are done', Sheikh Mujib as Prime Minister and President became the most hated man in Bangladesh within three short years of its founding. He and his family were killed for it. And the hatred lingers. Ten years after Mujib's death his daughter, Hasina, told me that she could not get the agreement of relatives and neighbours in their home village of Tungipara to erect a suitable monument over Mujib's grave. 'People react differently when you are not in power,' Hasina said in what could be an epitaph for both Mujib and General Zia. Moshtaque, who succeeded Mujib, has become a by-word for treachery. General Zia, the next man, was once idolised by the army. But then he showed his true colours and became the target of 20 mutinies and coup attempts in five years. The 21st killed him. As public awareness of the general's real role increases, Zia's memory too has become an embarrassment to his friends.

This book is the unvarnished story of their times, essentially the sad history of the first 10 years of Bangladesh. It is based on my close personal knowledge of the main protagonists; on more than 120 separate interviews with the men and women involved in the dramatic events; and on official archives and documents which I had the privilege to inspect personally. The dialogue, whenever used, is a faithful reproduction of the words which my informants said they actually used during the events in which they were involved. Thus majors Farook and Rashid tell the authentic story of the Why and the How of the killing of Sheikh Mujib; and the mystery is revealed of the slaughter of hapless Tajuddin and his companions in Dhaka jail by the men who planned and executed it. General Zia is exposed by his friends and his critics. His assassins tell how they killed him. And throughout the narrative of the wasted blood of

the Bangladesh martyrs cries out the lesson that when hope is extinguished, accountability denied and the people have nothing further to lose, they turn to violence to redress their wrongs.

Shakespeare said: 'The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones.' So it is with Sheikh Mujib and General Ziaur Rahman who by their headstrong acts and selfish ambition left Bangladesh a legacy of blood. In these circumstances the focus of this book inevitably is on the wrong doing. I make no apology for it. The people must know the truth about their leaders; and may we all take lesson from their mistakes.

November 1985

Anthony Mascarenhas

### List of officers convicted by General Court Martial and hanged for the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman:

1. BA-185 Brigadier Mohsinuddin Ahmed, Commander, 69 Infantry Brigade.
2. BA-200 Col. Nawzesh Uddin, Commander, 305 Infantry Brigade.
3. BA-212 Col. Muhammad Abdur Rashid, Commander, 65 Infantry Brigade.
4. BSS-675 Lt. Col. Shah Mohammad Fazle Hussain, CO, 6 East Bengal Regiment.
5. BA-301 Lt. Col. A. Y. M. Mahfuzur Rahman, Personal Secretary to President from C-in-C Secretariat.
6. BA-400 Lt. Col. Muhammad Dilawar Hussain, Asst. Director Ordnance Services, 24 Infantry Division, Chittagong.
7. BSS-722 Major Gias Uddin Ahmed, 2nd in Charge, 11 East Bengal Regiment.
8. BSS-839 Major Rawshan Iazdani Bhuiyan, Brigade Major, 65 Infantry Division.
9. BA-1167 Major Mohd. Mujibur Rahman, OC, 112 Signal Coy.
10. BSS-1070 Captain Mohd. Abdus Sattar, 6 East Bengal Regiment.
11. BSS-862 Major Kazi Mominul Haque, 2nd in Charge, 1 East Bengal Regiment.
12. BSS-1526 Captain Jamil Haque, 21 East Bengal Regiment.
13. BSS-1742 Lt. Mohammad Rafiqul Hassan Khan, 6 East Bengal Regiment.

## I

### Mujib and the Majors

*Nobody understands what I do for my country.*

—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

*I'm going to do it on the 15th.*

*I'm going to knock off Mujib.*

—Major Farook Rahman

Not one of the hundred or so guests at the Dhaka Golf Club on the evening of 12 August, 1975, is ever likely to forget the third wedding anniversary party given by the Acting Commandant of the Bengal Lancers, Major Farook Rahman, and his lovely young wife Farida.

Farook and Farida were a popular young couple, well-connected to the enduring upper crust of Bengali society, the polished old silver that gives the country its university chancellors, men of the Bar and senior civil servants. So their party was something of a social event. Even the heavens seemed to have taken note of it. Sunshine and a clear sky made a welcome break in the monsoons which had been soaking the city for weeks.

The party was a typical military bash since Farook was second generation army. Dozens of coloured lights strung between the acacias made a colourful canopy for the guests with their glasses of sherbet gathered in amiable groups on the lawn. The music came from the Army Headquarters band which set the mood with hits from the latest Bengali films. Inside the club house the buffet was a generous spread of lamb biryani, kebabs, an assortment of curries and more than a dozen bowls of fruit salad. There was enough to feed an army—and the army was everywhere.

The Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, who was Farook's 'Mamu' (maternal uncle) was there. So too was Brigadier Mashoorul Huq, Military Secretary to President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Farook's men, who had chipped in for an anniversary present, brought a handsome bedroom carpet woven from jute fibres. Friends and relatives had come with table lamps, vases and boxes gift-wrapped in the yellow, green and red kite paper favoured by the shopkeepers of New Market. But Brigadier Huq, who came later, upstaged them all. He brought an enormous bouquet of monsoon flowers made up by the head mali of Gonobaban, Sheikh Mujib's official residence. And he made a big thing of presenting it to Farida.

Three days later, with the benefit of hindsight, all those present would squeeze their minds searching every detail of the party for some clue that might have betrayed the momentous events which were to follow. And Brigadier Huq would silently thank his stars for his gallantry. Farida's bouquet may have saved his life.

But on that anniversary night Farook gave not a hint of the dark secret he carried. He recalled that he was in an unusually expansive mood. 'I sold my

automatic slide projector for 3500 Takkas and blew it all on the party.' For him it had an awesome finality. What he had set his mind on doing would either put him before a firing squad or indelibly carve his name in the history of Bangladeshis.

'I decided to enjoy myself. That party could have been my last.'

When the guests had left, a small family group gathered on the lawn for a snack and coffee. The hosts had been too busy to eat. With the couple were Farook's mother and father, Farida's mother who had come from Chittagong, and Farida's elder sister Zubeida, nicknamed 'Tinku' with her husband Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid who commanded the 2 Field Artillery based in Dhaka.

Farook took his brother-in-law aside.

'I'm going to do it on the 15th,' he told Rashid. 'I'm going to knock off Mujib on Friday morning.'

Rashid was startled. He looked round nervously to see if anyone had overheard Farook's bombshell. Suddenly the months of secret plotting had reached a conclusion. But Rashid was not ready. After a long moment of silence he hissed: 'Are you mad? It's too short notice. We don't have officers. We don't have equipment. How can we do it?'

Farook stared at Rashid, a glint of steel shining through the tinted glasses he wore. 'It's my decision,' he told the other major. 'I have the tactical plan ready. I'm going ahead even if I have to do it alone. You can keep away if you want. But remember, if I fail they will surely hang you also.'

Another long silence from Rashid. He appeared to be visibly digesting Farook's words. When their harsh meaning finally seeped through, the lanky artillery officer straightened out. 'All right,' he told Farook. 'If it's got to be done let's do it. But we must talk. I need to bring in some more officers.'

In another part of the city Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was relaxing with a small family group in his modest bungalow on Road No. 32, Dhanmandi, the landmark which was till then the centre of the world of the Bangladeshis. The clan had gathered two days earlier for the wedding of Mujib's niece, the daughter of his younger sister, and many of them had stayed on to pay their respects and to get the great man's blessings. Once the obeisances were made Begum Mujib gently ushered them out till her tired husband was left with a selected few. One of those present was Abdur Rab Serniabat, Mujib's brother-in-law, and husband of his favourite sister. He was a minister with a string of portfolios—Flood Control, Water Development, Power, Forests, Fisheries, and Livestock. Another was Serniabat's son, Abu Hasnat, who three days later would have a miraculous escape when disaster obliterated the rest of the family.

It was not unusual that the conversation that night should have as much to do with official matters as those concerning the family. Mujib's style made the two inseparable. In his world of suspicion and intrigue reliance was understandably placed on those nearest and dearest to him. And when he became absorbed with anything concerning his beloved Bangladesh, the family was inevitably drawn in. Tonight it was flood control.

Abu Hasnat recalled: 'Uncle was worried about the possibility of floods in the autumn months which could severely damage the rice crop. He told my father he should quickly press into service the dredger he was arranging to buy from India.' Mujib had a farmer's gift for anecdotes. Soon, in the manner of a village elder, he was framing the problem of the moment against a background of a personal experience deeply rooted in the soil of the delta country. The

room filled with the aroma from his pipe. 'When I was a boy,' he told his listeners, 'I used to play football on the banks of the river with the Britishers from the dredger company. Then the war came and the dredgers were taken away to make barges for the Burma campaign. They never came back. Now there is no river where I used to play, only silt; and we have great floods every year.'

As he rambled on Mujib warmed to the idea of what he was going to do to solve the problem. 'I have no money for flood control, but I am getting my dredger,' he told the family. 'You will see how I comb the rivers. My BKSAL\* will do it.'

Then his mood changed, enthusiasm deflating like a man suddenly overcome by futility. Hasnat remembers the last words he would hear his uncle speak: 'Nobody understands what I do for my country.'

That remark is Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's epitaph.

He was then nearing the end of a life-long love affair with the Bengalis. It was a tempestuous love-hate relationship which only intensely emotional and excitable people are capable of. They idolised him, calling him Bangabandhu, the 'Bengalis' friend', and they invested him with an unsustainable magic. And Mujib, the man and the idol, would relate to his people with a matching intensity—to their hopes, their joys, anguish and intrigues; to the proffered sycophancy and the demanding greed. 'My strength,' he used to say, 'is that I love my people. My weakness is that I love them too much.'

Since the birth of Bangladesh three and a half years earlier, Mujib had ruled them like a village headman, the guru who had suddenly—and a little awkwardly—been called upon to make good. He worked with unfailing zeal even if it was misplaced; and he had a secretariat full of good intentions. But then he also confused platitudes with policies; he would grasp at simplistic solutions such as the solitary dredger on which he pinned such high hope; and he would intrigue. Inevitably the magic faded and the adulation turned sour.

Despite all these shortcomings even the cynics sipping pink gin in the Saqi bar of Hotel Dhaka Intercontinental grudgingly conceded that Mujib would somehow muddle through. To them, and to the others in Bangladesh, it was inconceivable that he would not. But on that August night the impossible was happening. The tumbrels had begun to roll. The majors were coming.

\* BKSAL pronounced Bakshal, was the acronym for the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, a one-party system of government announced by Mujib on 26 March 1975.

## II

### A False Start

*If he had asked us to eat grass or to dig the earth with our bare hands we would have done it for him. But look how he behaved!*

—Major Farook Rahman

A hotel room in central London, albeit a plush suite in Claridges, is an unlikely setting for the installation of the first president of the world's newest and eighth most populous state. Nevertheless on this grey winter's morning Razaul Karim, the acting head of the London Mission, was quietly informing Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the new role that destiny had designed for him.

It was a little after 9 am on 8 January, 1972, a Saturday, exactly 23 days after the formal birth of Bangladesh was achieved by the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani troops to the Indian army in Dhaka. President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who only a few days earlier had replaced General Yahya Khan as the new Pakistani head of state, had unexpectedly put Mujib and his former constitutional adviser, Dr Kamal Hussain, on a PIA Boeing for a secret flight to London. Why London? No one now remains to tell the full truth about this incident. But when the plane touched down at Heathrow airport at 6.30 that morning it brought to a happy ending the months of agonising uncertainty about Mujib's fate.

Although he looked travel worn, Mujib felt gloriously alive as he waited for the jubilant crowds to descend upon him. He ambled compulsively from room to room, the deferential Karim trailing behind. He admired the flowers. Now and then he flopped onto a deep-cushioned sofa as though testing its comfort. But what attracted him most were the big glass windows. He peered through them at the traffic on the road outside like a fascinated child. Mujib was savouring his first full day of freedom after nine months of solitary confinement within the shadow of the gallows in a Pakistani prison.

I had been tipped off about Mujib's arrival by Nicholas Carroll, deputy foreign editor of The Sunday Times, who had heard it as a BBC news flash. Mujib was an old friend and, professional interest apart, I was delighted to meet him again after the trauma each of us had suffered in the preceding year in the struggle for Bangladesh. We had first met in 1956 in the Karachi residence of his political mentor, Husseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, who later became prime minister of Pakistan. The friendship developed in the summer of 1958 when for almost a month we shared hotel rooms in Washington, Flagstaff (Arizona), San Francisco and Los Angeles during a tour at the invitation of the American government. I still have a photograph of us taken in Paramount Studios, Hollywood, with our host the great movie mogul Cecil B. De Mille, Mickey Rooney and Ava Gardner.

It was a happy time. Mujib was then very much a junior politician without the inhibition of having to maintain a political image. It was summer. He was a million miles from home and let his hair down. In later years I used to tease Mujib that I knew him better than his wife. And once when things got rough

in Bangladesh in 1973, I told my exasperated friend, 'Why don't you give it all up. You can make a better living at cards.' Indeed he could. If I could locate them now I'm sure three Indonesian journalists would confirm this.

We were on the night train from the Grand Canyon to Los Angeles and after dinner got together with the Indonesians for a game of 'Flush', the three-card poker popular in the East. The opening rounds were even. Then we began to lose steadily. Soon it became obvious from the way the cards were running that we were being sharked. I suggested to Mujib that we stop and cut our losses. Mujib silenced me. He asked the Pullman attendant for a new pack, shuffled the cards and began to deal. Abruptly the 'luck' changed. Try as they might all through the long night the Indonesians were never able to make it again. When we pulled into Los Angeles next morning Mujib and I were richer by \$386, a wrist watch, a Parker 51 with a gold cap, and a thin gold ring in the shape of a snake.

I asked Mujib how he did it. His answer is seared in my memory. 'When you play with gentlemen, you play like a gentleman. But when you play with bastards, make sure you play like a bigger bastard. Otherwise you will lose.' Then he added with a laugh, 'Don't forget I have had good teachers.' It was a startling glimpse of this earthy, gut-fighting politician and the intrigue and the violence to which he was bred. Later, when his star soared and he began to make headlines, I would recall these words and have no difficulty predicting the response he would make to the crisis of the moment.

Now we were together again, friends/professionals, in London, with Mujib about to start the most momentous game of his life. We talked, and I sat and listened while he talked to the others. And when I finally left to write my story it was with the unsettling impression that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangabandhu, President and Bangladesh's man on a white charger, at the moment of taking up his stewardship had only the foggiest notion of what it was all about.

What's more, he was secretly nursing a tentative deal with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto which would have maintained a 'link' between Pakistan and its breakaway province, Bangladesh.

I got a glimpse of this unsavoury deal, which was totally at variance with the Bangladeshi mood, when Mujib confided to me: 'I have a big scoop for you. We are going to keep some link with Pakistan but I can't say anything more till I have talked it over with the others. And for God's sake don't you write anything till I tell you.'

Apparently Bhutto, during the course of some lengthy private conversations with Mujib in a government rest house on the outskirts of Rawalpindi just before he sent him out to London, had talked him into an understanding for a 'link' with Pakistan. Thus the astute Bhutto hoped to inveigle Mujib into a concession that would have had the effect of turning the clock back and negating the Bangladeshi freedom struggle. What exactly the formula was, Mujib did not tell me. But my own instant reaction to the disclosure was one of horror. 'Are you mad?' I told him. 'Don't you know what's happened in Bangladesh? After what the people have gone through they will lynch you on the streets of Dhaka, Bangabandhu or no Bangabandhu, if you so much as utter one word about a link.'

Mujib did not have time to answer me. We were interrupted by the Indian High Commissioner, B. K. Nehru, who wanted a private word with him. Mujib's re-education had begun.

Mujib's isolation in prison had been total during the nine months Bangladesh

was being fashioned in the crucible of genocide and war. He received no letters, read no newspapers, had no radio to listen to. He was not allowed to converse even with his jailors. He did not know how his country had been devastated by the Pakistan army or how two million people had died. And just as the world was uncertain about his fate, Mujib did not know the fate of his own wife and children.

Mujib had gone to jail the leader of the biggest party in the newly elected Pakistan National Assembly, valiantly striving for a wide-ranging autonomy for his province. Since then East Pakistan's autonomy demand had made way for the reality of Bangladesh's independence. Even the map had changed for Pakistan. It was not surprising, therefore, that when Mujib emerged once more into the sunshine, it was like a latter-day Rip Van Winkle, out of touch and out of tune with the times. And, it would seem from the circumstances, he had got up from the wrong side of the bed.

Time had stood still for Mujib the man, but not for Mujib the martyr. One of his party men, an Awami League adviser in Dhaka, was quoted as saying 'It's astonishing that this man can sit out the war for nine months and come back stronger than he ever was before.' Mujib's enshrinement was far advanced. 'You have been confined, but your spirit could not be imprisoned,' the Indian prime minister Mrs Indira Gandhi, said of him. 'You have become a symbol of the voice of the oppressed ...'

It was not the first time that imprisonment had made a demi-god of a national hero. But in Mujib's case the embellishing of the legend was a Bengali phenomenon, an exaggerated emotionalism which would become all the more unseemly when its application was abruptly reversed the day Mujib was killed. Now, however, the headlines roared 'Mujib is a magic word. Mujib is a miracle name.'<sup>2</sup>

Setting the scene at that time in Dhaka, Martin Woollacott said in a cable to the Guardian: 'Bengalis are awaiting the return of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in reverential, near religious mood. The legend is about to be made flesh ... (Ordinary Bengalis have mentally invested the Sheikh with extraordinary powers. Little credit goes to the Bangladesh government or to the Indian government for the successful liberation of the country: All belongs to the Sheikh, who controlled events even from a prison cell thousands of miles away.)'<sup>3</sup>

Man had been made mountain and now the mountain was being asked to move. Mujib, however, on that winter's day in London was not in a mood for miracles. The strain of 'the long journey from darkness to light'<sup>4</sup> had begun to tell. 'I need some rest,' he told me. 'I want to relax in London for a few days. Then I will go back to my people. I will not do anything till I have visited every district and seen every face.' These were Mujib's plans—until the telephones began to ring.

The first call came through at 10.30. It was the Bangladesh Mission in Calcutta. Answering the squawks from the other end of the line, Mujib said 'Don't worry. I am safe. I am alive and in good health. Please tell them all—telephone to Dhaka—I endorse what has happened. Bangladesh has come to stay. No one on earth can change that fact.' There were three other telephones in the suite and they all began ringing together. Razaul Karim picked one up. 'Sir,' he called out, 'Dhaka on the line. The Prime Minister (Tajuddin Ahmad) would like to talk to you.' Another phone rang. 'Sir, you are wanted by Calcutta.' Then more calls from Dhaka and Calcutta, one from Mrs Gandhi in New Delhi and another from Edward Heath, Britain's Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing Street. By 11 o'clock Suite 112 in Claridges had become the

temporary capital of Bangladesh. By that time also it was painfully clear to Mujib that if he did not get to Dhaka very quickly there was grave danger of the new government falling apart and the risk of civil strife. The war was over. The in-fighting, the jostling for power in the Awami League had begun.

Peter Hazelhurst in a despatch from Dhaka to the Times, London, painted a gloomy picture of the situation in the city. 'As the euphoria of victory begins wearing thin, the sense of jubilation is rapidly being replaced by a national mood of suspicion and resentment against the outsider ... There are also signs that the liberation movement is becoming disillusioned with the Awami League government ... (It is clear that the only cementing force capable of holding the country together is the charisma surrounding the one and only man who counts in the country today, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.)'<sup>5</sup>

The Awami League government, headed by prime minister Tajuddin Ahmad, ensconced in Dhaka was little more than a government in name. Its legitimacy was not questioned, but, paradoxically, its right to lead was. During the Bengali upsurge against the Pakistan army's campaign of genocide in East Pakistan in 1971, the Mujibnagar Government, as the government in exile in India was known, served as an umbrella for resistance. But Mujibnagar, true to its name (there is no such place) was an unsubstantial thing, the Bengali equivalent of 'God's Little Acre', moved about as convenience dictated. Mujibnagar was neither the command console nor the cutting edge of the resistance. Things were done in its name by fighting men in the field. They accepted only the most formal patronage and they gave only a ritual allegiance. Peter Hazelhurst, who is quoted earlier, with great perception underscored the distinction between 'the liberation movement' and the 'Awami League government'.

The most expositive commentary on the role of the Mujibnagar government is the fact that at the end of the liberation war it had no place whatsoever in the formal surrender of the Pakistani troops in Dhaka on 16 December, 1971. Nevertheless, shortly after that date the Awami Leaguers were installed as the government in Dhaka with no challenge to its legality. Welcoming the ministers when they flew in from Calcutta were members of all political parties, including Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, chairman of the left-wing National Awami Party (NAP), and the legendary Moni Singh of the Communist Party.<sup>6</sup>

The first and perhaps only real decision the 'government' took was to reject off-hand Professor Muzaffar Ahmad's proposal to have an interim national government of all parties. But before that the first government of Bangladesh had begun to show unmistakable signs of coming unstuck.

It was a mishmash of political entities, divided not so much by ideological considerations as by the extra-territorial labels that, rightly or wrongly, its members were supposed to wear. Thus ministers were commonly classified as pro-America, pro-Russia or pro-India. In this context Tajuddin Ahmad was labelled pro-India, Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed as pro-America and Abdus Samad Azad pro-Russia. (Major Farook was to complain later: 'I couldn't find anyone who was supposed to be pro-Bangladesh!'). Tajuddin Ahmad, the prime minister and most able administrator among the lot, was the first among equals and no more. The system was a collegiate one. The throne was still vacant.<sup>7</sup>

These internal dissensions gravely handicapped the government in facing up to its many problems—and they were monstrous and pressing. The depredations of the Pakistan army during the eight months of Bengali resistance and the attrition during the 14-day war had devastated the country. There was no food or medicines in the shops. The jute and tea industries, in normal times the principal foreign exchange earners, had collapsed. At the same time ten



million refugees who had gone to India and twenty million people displaced within the country needed shelter in addition to food and clothing. It was a mad race against time for the monsoons would shut down the country in summer. Topping it all was the destruction of the transport and communications systems which made the movement of relief supplies a daily miracle. There was extensive damage to the railway track, signalling equipment and rolling stock. In a delta area where cross-country movement is dependent on bridges and river ferries, every major bridge (at least 280 of varying sizes) and more than half the river transport were destroyed. The remaining river craft could only be used at great risk because in most cases navigation lights and buoys marking the narrow channels had been blown up along with the command stations of the delta navigation system. Chittagong, one of the country's two ports and the principal entry point for food imports, was rendered unservicable by 29 wrecks blocking the Karnafulli River channel. Fewer than 1000 of the country's 8000 truck fleet were servicable. There was no gasoline. Bangladesh desperately needed 2.5 million tons of food to avoid famine. And when this was forthcoming from the international community it required an additional miracle to get it to the country's 60,000 villages.

I have not been able to confirm it, but there was an hilarious story making the rounds in Dhaka in January, 1972, when the jostling among the Awami League ministers was at its height. Every move on the macabre chessboard was being carefully scrutinised for advantage and in these circumstances there was, apparently, no agreement about who should preside over the 'historic' first meeting of the cabinet. Should it be Vice President Syed Nazrul Islam or should it be Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad? The issue was resolved with Eastern ingenuity. It took the form of a tea party with Mujib's uncle representing the absent Bangabandhu, as chief guest. The cakes and the ministers were placed on two long tables joined at one end by a smaller one. In the middle of this head table sat Mujib's uncle flanked by Tajuddin Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam. Tea was served. The photographers were called in. The cabinet had its first meeting. Thus history was inscribed without loss of face!

No such delicacy was shown in another matter. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was 'foreign minister' in the Mujibnagar government based in Calcutta, turned up at his office in Dhaka to find his chair occupied by a junior colleague, Abdus Samad Azad. It transpired that Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad had removed Moshtaque from the job because he had been secretly conspiring with the Americans for a political compromise intended to avoid the break-up of Pakistan. Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, was anxious to help Pakistan because he was using it as a secret channel of communication to arrange President Nixon's historic visit to China. To this end the Americans began to secretly negotiate with Moshtaque. His colleagues never forgive Moshtaque this treachery. Thus, as part of the treatment, no one bothered to inform him that Tajuddin, on moving to Dhaka, had overnight changed his job.

Khandaker Moshtaque swallowed the insult. But he did not forget. Later, when he got the opportunity, he extracted a terrible vengeance on those who had insulted him.

The war had also left an estimated 350,000 guns with vast quantities of ammunition in private hands. Since the people were desperate short of their daily necessities, the underground armouries inevitably helped to create 'a dangerous law and order situation' as the official jargon described it. Topping this were numerous bands of heavily armed 'guerillas' such as those led by

Sheikh Moni, Nurul Alam Siddiqui, Tofail and Siraj whose attitude to the government was both militant and recalcitrant. They swore they would obey only Sheikh Mujib's orders.<sup>8</sup>

In these circumstances it is understandable that the Awami League ministers and politicians should burn up the telephone line to London demanding Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's immediate return to Bangladesh. He had no alternative.

The panoply of a state welcome is an impressive spectacle. The flags, massed bands, the cadence of the slow march of a Sovereign's guard of honour, the 21-gun salute: they are all carefully designed to impress. India, with its timeless pageantry and instant crowds gives the show a majestic dimension. When New Delhi rolled out the red carpet for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman it was with a fervour that those present will always remember. While flying from London to Dhaka, Mujib had made a brief stop-over in New Delhi to thank India for the assistance it had given his people ('The people of India are the best friends of my people.'). On hand to greet him at Palam Airport on the morning of 10 January 1972, were the President, Dr. V. V. Giri, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the Chiefs of the three Indian Defence Services whose prowess had underwritten the creation of Bangladesh, the Cabinet ministers and members of the Diplomatic Corps. Even more memorable than this glittering receiving line, I was told by one of those present, was the vibrant intrusion of uncounted millions of faceless Indians—the people who had supported the Bangladesh struggle for independence—who joined the welcoming through All India Radio's broadcast.

The heart of India was in New Delhi that morning. My friend, Narayan Swami, who is normally very cynical, recalled with awe: 'It was as if the radio had not only taken the ceremony to the people but by some strange mystique had also brought them to the spectator stands. You could feel them there!'

Mujib was deeply moved by it all. Until then a flag car was the most he had rated by way of official protocol, and that too very briefly during two short spells as a provincial minister in East Pakistan. Now, he was to tell his family: 'India itself turned out to do me honour.'

The transformation to demi-god was completed a few hours later when Mujib returning to Dhaka was overwhelmed by the reception he got. Thousands of people crammed every vantage point in the airport terminal building. Many hundreds of thousands more linked the roads all the way to the airport. And when Mujib reached Suhrawardy Udyan, the sprawling old race course where he had last spoken to the people at the height of the civil disobedience on 7 March of the previous year, it was as if a human sea had been packed into the three square mile arena. Nothing like this had happened ever before in Dhaka. There's been nothing like it since then. The frenzied cheering, the extravagant praise, the public worship and obeisance were beyond the wildest dreams of any man.

The day's events would leave a lasting impression on Mujib because, if anything, he was an impressionable man and very vain. In his mind's eye there would henceforth always be cheering crowds and flags. But the trouble was that even before the last echoes of the cheering had faded, Mujib the demi-god, was bought face-to-face with an overwhelming reality.

'My heart sang to be home again and among my people' he told me at our first meeting in Dhaka after London. 'But then I was brought face-to-face with the greatest man-made disaster in history. I could never imagine the magnitude of the catastrophe. They have killed more than three million of my people. They have raped our mothers and our sisters and have butchered our

children. More than 30 per cent of all houses have been destroyed. Bangladesh has been flattened. There is danger of famine. We need help.'

My friend spelled out his nightmare problem with a series of questions he threw at me: 'What do you do about currency? Where do you get food? Industries are dead. Commerce is dead. How do you start them again? What do you do about defence? I have no administration. Where do I get one? Tell me, how do you start a country?'

Mujib's outburst was only temporary. There was another quick shift in mood, confidence returning with every sweep of his hands as though plucking it from the air. He was the demi-god again. 'I tell you I can do it; I will do it with these hands.'

Mujib's return to Dhaka had averted the threat of civil war in Bangladesh and given the government the substance and authority it had hitherto lacked. But this did not mean an end to the intrigue and in-fighting within the cabinet nor the extinction of the armed bands operating as a law unto themselves in the countryside. Only now Mujib's presence had temporarily put a lid on them. But exist they did in various shadowy forms which were for the moment tolerated by Mujib so long as the combatants made both public and private obeisance to him. But the internal pressures did influence his style. He conducted himself not as the 'father of the nation' nor as its all-serving President, but rather as the President of the Awami League. He played politics with his henchmen. He got embroiled in their intrigues. The savage in-fighting only whetted his natural instinct to retain all power for himself. That's why he chose to be Bangladesh's first Prime Minister, not its first President.

As mentioned earlier, the President's throne had been kept vacant for Mujib. Indeed he had been hailed as President of Bangladesh on reaching London and it was universally assumed that he would continue in that role. But being Head of State in a Westminster-style government meant Mujib should allow executive authority to vest in the Prime Minister, in this case Tajuddin Ahmad. Here came the rub. Mujib's perceptions were too narrow. He had a one-track mind in the matter of power. If the system required the Prime Minister to hold the reins of authority, then Mujib would be Prime Minister. But if instead supreme executive authority was vested in the President, then Mujib would be the President. His family and his shallow, sycophantic advisers would urge him on for the elementary reason that the more executive power he wielded the closer they would be to the fountain of patronage and wealth.

A minor reason for Mujib's decision—which was privately made much of at that time—were the anomalies there were about Tajuddin's position as Prime Minister. No one questioned Tajuddin's ability to run the administration. His authority, however, was never fully accepted by his senior colleagues. Even during the 'Mujibnagar' days they had resented his elevation with Indian help to the top job. In their eyes Tajuddin, despite his ability, remained almost an upstart. He had been general secretary of the 'provincial' Awami League, a relatively junior position, when the independence struggle began in March 1971, and there were several others holding 'national' office who considered themselves higher in the party's pecking order. Moreover, rightly or wrongly, Tajuddin had been lumbered with the pro-Indian label. In the circumstances this was a major impediment since it was generally recognised at that time that Bangladesh's entanglement with India should be speedily ended in favour of a 'regularised relationship' which would eliminate international objections to the recognition of the new state.<sup>10</sup>

Mujib kicked Tajuddin sideways and became Prime Minister. But at the

same time he made sure that the Head of State would in fact be a sinecure and never a danger to him. For that role he chose a non-political person, the meekest, most inoffensive man he could find, Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury, who had shot to prominence as the international spokesman for the Mujibnagar government. President Chowdhury was admirably docile. And so that there should be no misunderstanding about his role he sported a large Mujib badge on his coat.

The scene in Gonobaban in the early days of Mujib's rule was a 20th century parody of a Moghul court. Mujib had an office in the secretariat but he spent only a minimum amount of time there, preferring to function from his official residence which he used as a private office. Its relaxed atmosphere was more to his taste. There he would hold court for his cronies, for party men and petitioners who like bees to a honeypot gravitated to Dhaka with outstretched hands. They would descend on him in big groups and small. When ushered into the presence they would garland Bangabandhu, touch his feet, weep loudly. Some would burst into song—some well-known Bengali folksong—and Mujib, eyes opaque with emotion, would join in. In between he would have a quiet word with one of his ministers, instruct a civil servant about some urgent matter of state, and receive visiting reporters and VIPs who came to see the uncrowned king of the world's newest state.

Everyone went away with a promise of action. Mujib would grab the paper from the outstretched hands of a petitioner, pat him on the cheek, then wave him on. 'Go. I will see to it.' That was the last the petitioner, or Mujib, would hear about it. Later, when commenting on Mujib's assassination, my friend, Abu Musa, a perceptive but disillusioned journalist, would tell me: 'He promised everything and he betrayed everyone.'

Soon the dual roles he had undertaken began to show up the folly of the arrangement. As prime minister, Mujib was required to inject harsh discipline into the government, to recreate a country from scratch along orderly lines. Most of all he had to sustain and guide into channels of reconstruction the tremendous patriotic fervour that galvanised the people in 1971. Mujib could do none of these things. As Bangabandhu, the friend and father-figure, Mujib had to be magnanimous, forgiving and helpful. This role was more suited to his nature, for Mujib was large-hearted, a kindly man, generous to a fault and one who never forgot a face or a friendship. Mujib did not have the capacity to compartment his hats. Every moment of the day he was simultaneously Prime Minister and Bangabandhu. The contradictions inherent in this situation inevitably led to chaos.

I was given a vivid example of the shape of things to come shortly after Mujib had been sworn in as Prime Minister. Just before the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha, Bangabandhu, it transpired, had ordered that the workers of the Adamjee Jute Mills near Narayanganj be given one month's wages immediately in settlement of arrears. This was heartening news for the starving workers of the world's biggest jute mill. Like the rest of industry, the mill had come to a grinding halt with the outbreak of the India-Pakistan war the previous month, leaving thousands of workers not only unemployed but also unpaid for the work they had done. The owners had abandoned the mills with the advent of Bangladesh. There was not enough money to meet the payroll. Now the great festival, the first since independence, was approaching. Bangabandhu's intervention was therefore joyfully received.

When I called at the mill at 9.30 the next morning, I found at least 3000 people queued up outside the gates in a buoyant mood. Inside the mill the paymaster was well organised. A dozen tables had been placed in the com-

pound. Each had a tally clerk, a ledger, tin moneybox, pen and inkpot. The only thing missing was the money. 'They money is coming from Dhaka' he told me. 'We are waiting for it.'

They waited and waited and waited. By 2 pm there was still no sign of the money. But that time angry cries and stones were coming over the wall from the seething crowd outside. The workers were demanding to be paid ... 'as Bangabandhu ordered'. The paymaster, who had become a nervous wreck, had sent an SOS to the Deputy Commissioner, who in turn had arranged for an army contingent to reinforce the police guard to prevent the gates being battered down.

Before things got worse, someone had the bright idea of rushing a message to Bangabandhu 'to appraise him of the situation'. Accordingly a young officer was drafted for this purpose. Since he planned to sneak out by way of the river, I decided it would be the better part of valour not to stay behind. Two hours later we were in Gonobaban, Mujib's official residence, and the young officer was explaining the problem. Mujib was furious. He couldn't believe his orders had not been carried out after he had made a public commitment. 'Why have they not been paid?' he bellowed. 'I gave orders it should be done this morning. Who is responsible?'

His temper sparked a flurry of activity. Assistant Secretaries and PAs rushed up and down the crowded corridors looking for someone. When the offending officer from the Finance Ministry was finally brought before Mujib he explained that under the new regulations the mills could not draw more than 100,000 Takkas from the bank without special sanction and he had been patiently waiting in an ante-room for Bangabandhu's 'Daskat' (authorisation) for it. Mujib had all day been receiving a flood of visitors: party workers, old friends, relatives, senior civil servants with files and ministers wanting a quiet word in his ear. The officious guardians of the Prime Minister's door had apparently thought the matter of paying 3000 workers not important enough to 'disturb' him and the officer requiring authorisation for money had been kept out. Mujib scolded them. He ordered a senior Awami Leaguer to 'proceed to Narayanganj immediately and promise the workers that Inshah Allah, they definitely will be paid tomorrow'.

The young officer from the mill was shattered by the experience. When I took him out for a belated lunch, he told me: 'Bangabandhu commands there shall be rain and he cannot understand why the rain does not fall. God help us!'

The Prime Minister's house was a long way from Tungipara, the tiny village in Faridpur district where Mujib was born on 17 March, 1920, one of six children in a middle class family of modest means. His father, Lutfur Rahman, was an official of the local district court. When Mujib went to the mission school in Gopalganj his studies were interrupted for a while by an attack of beriberi which permanently affected his eye-sight. He finished high school when he was 22.

At an early age he displayed the qualities which would one day make him the central figure in the politics of the India sub-continent. One was a hyper-active social conscience; another an over-riding passion for politics. When ten years old he was caught distributing rice from the family supplies to tenant farmers who worked the property. Mujib told his father: 'They were hungry, and we have all these things.' Nineteen years later while a law student in Dhaka University, Mujib received a two and a half year jail sentence for championing another underdog, this time the university's menial workers. He

grandly explained: 'I did not come to the university to bow my head to injustice.' But before that, when he was 17, he was caught in the front line of an anti-British demonstration and spent six days in jail. The experience only whetted his appetite for politics.

The tumultuous events of the early 1940s when the demand for Pakistan as a separate state for the Muslims of the sub-continent was pressed by the Muslim League, came as food and drink to the young Mujib. He was then a student of history and political science in the Islamia College, Calcutta. Mujib flung himself into the Pakistan movement. Within months his great talent for political organising began to be noticed and he moved up rapidly in the hierarchy of the Muslim League. When graduation coincided with the creation of Pakistan in 1947, Mujib moved to Dhaka the capital of East Pakistan province, and enrolled as a student of law in Dhaka University.

One day in March, 1948, he joined thousands of other Bengalis in the Paltan Maidan to hear Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, speak on his one and only visit to the eastern province. They had gone to cheer the Quaid-i-Azam or 'great Leader', but Mr. Jinnah stunned his audience when he bluntly told them 'Urdu is going to be the lingua franca of this country ... Anyone who says anything else is an enemy of Pakistan.'

Bengalis are nothing without their culture and the language is its greatest manifestation. The support of the Bengali Muslims for the Pakistan cause had been fundamental to its success. Even at that time they constituted more than half the new state's population. Yet here was the Pakistan Head of State asking them to forswear the Bengali language in favour of Urdu which he arrogantly equated with Islam, the established religion of Pakistan. Mr. Jinnah's remarks therefore came as a slap in the face of the Bengalis. It was doubly galling to the students in the vanguard of the language movement. Apart from language and culture, it was an economic proposition which would put the young Bengali at serious disadvantage with his counterpart in West Pakistan who would automatically have command over Urdu since it was widely spoken there. The Bengali student would have to learn an additional language, Urdu, along with the burden of his regular studies in order to qualify for a decent job in the government or outside.<sup>11</sup>

The angry students at the meeting, Mujib among them, immediately rose in protest. They carried the agitation to the streets. From there it quickly spread to the rest of the province to become the first step in the Bengali disenchantment with Pakistan. Meanwhile Mujib, as one of the ring leaders, was clapped into jail for seven days. It was his first taste of solitary confinement.

The language agitation marked the turning point in Mujib's life. Henceforth he would turn his back on sectarian politics, which he condemned as divisive, giving himself fully to a relentless crusade against the economic and political exploitation of the Bengalis by their compatriots in West Pakistan.

Mujib's great strength—and success—lay in an elemental ability to fathom the full measure of his people's emotions and to arouse and articulate them with a resounding eloquence. He had a fantastic ability to relate to crowds. Because of this his opponents would deride him as a rabble rouser. However that may be, time and circumstance put a high premium on his talent and at a crucial moment he became the symbol and supreme spokesman of a gigantic human upsurge against discrimination and tyranny. For his pains Mujib was cruelly hounded, spending 11½ years of the next 20 in Pakistani prisons. Martyrdom, however, only served to enhance his image. 'He was a great man before,' someone once said, 'But those bastards made him even greater.'

Mujib only briefly savoured the fruits of ministerial office. He had neither

the taste nor the talent for it. In his second short spell as a provincial minister (in 1956 when he held the portfolios of Commerce, Labour and Industries, and Anti-Corruption in Aaur Rahman Khan's Awami League cabinet), Mujib couldn't stomach the routine. So he requested permission to bow out and devote his restless energy to reorganising the Awami League. Field work, his first love, remained his forte and took him to the top. But this apostle of agitation was never able to overcome the fundamental flaws in his make-up. Mujib saw everything in simplistic terms. He had a tendency to over-simplify even the most complex economic and agricultural problems. And to an overriding obsession for power was added an immensely suspicious nature. He would unscrupulously intrigue to eliminate the slightest threat to his supremacy, however imagined it might be. This was the dark side of the beguiling moon. When Mujib became Prime Minister of Bangladesh it was these traits, more than anything else in his complex character, that came to the fore.

Two weeks after he had installed himself in Dhaka I asked him if he still had a mind to undertake the meet-the-people tours he had planned in London. Mujib was affronted by my question. 'How can I do it?' he said very crossly. 'Don't you see I have to erect an administration?' He was doing this in the free-wheeling Mujib style. Available bureaucrats were posted under his direction. Even office assistants and clerks were not too small for his attention. Offices in the secretariat began filling with an odd assortment of people, many of them quite evidently not at all suitable. Sinecurists were found everywhere.

Many appointments were made on the basis of a nodding acquaintance with Mujib or on the recommendation of his close friends. The Awami League leaders had been installed in key positions and they brought in their relatives and friends. Some even took commission for a chit. You had to have a godfather to get a job. If you had one, all disqualifications were overlooked, even the cardinal sin of collaboration with the defeated Pakistan military regime.

A prime example was Mahboobul Alam, the Dhaka correspondent of DAWN. Published in Karachi, DAWN was the leading English-language newspaper of West Pakistan and those connected with it were held in esteem by the authorities. After the Pakistan army had launched its campaign of genocide in East Pakistan, West Pakistanis in Dhaka used to jokingly refer to Mahboobul Alam as a 'sarkari' (i.e. pro-government) Bengali to differentiate from the other Bengali journalists who were either openly hostile or sullenly uncooperative. True to this reputation, Mahboobul Alam later that year wrote scripts for Radio Pakistan's PLAIN TRUTH programme—a highly-coloured propaganda or disinformation effort aimed at the Bangladeshi freedom struggle. For this he was paid between Rs 30 and Rs 50 per piece, about £4 at the prevailing rate of exchange. After the liberation of Bangladesh Mahboobul Alam found himself both without a job and covered with the odium of having betrayed the freedom movement by backing the wrong side. But instead of being locked up in jail on charges of collaboration, as another journalist writing for PLAIN TRUTH was, Mahboobul Alam wangled a job, of all things, as Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman's press officer. But because of the stink it created even Mujib had to get rid of him. It must make the Bangladeshi martyrs turn in their graves to know that this posturing turn-coat, as some others like him, went on to become a Bangladeshi ambassador.

Before long the carnival atmosphere of Gonobaban began to assume a most sinister aspect. Mujib, it was evident, had not erected a new administration of Bangladeshi nationalists filled with patriotic zeal. What he had done between the rounds of musical chairs, was to retain and refurbish the old

discredited bureaucracy of the erstwhile East Pakistan. Unlike the large mass of Bengali military officers and men who had actively fought against the Pakistanis or had suffered the agony of being disarmed, isolated and marooned in West Pakistan, many of the civilian officers of East Pakistan administration—with some notable exceptions—had for the most part remained in their jobs and ostensibly loyal to Pakistan during the Liberation War. A variety of reasons were advanced for not joining the resistance. A few had ideological reservations about the Bangladesh movement because of the support it was receiving from India. Others found excuses to play it safe and not to risk jobs and property. Some—and a lot of policemen fall into this category—even distinguished themselves as instruments for the repression of their own people. When Bangladesh became independent on 16th December, 1971, they quickly jumped on the bandwagon, proclaiming their new-found nationalism as loudly as they had denied it the week before. For this these turncoats were derisively dubbed the '16th Division'.

M. R. Akhtar ('Mukul') in his book 'Mujibur Rakta Lal', trenchantly observed: 'There is no parallel in the history of any country where after a protracted and bloody liberation war the defeated bureaucracy and the military officers were not only given continuity of service but were also accepted in the new regime with great respect while the patriots were excluded.'

I am not one of those who advocated a witch hunt of collaborators. Far from it. As we will see later, there were obvious pitfalls in that direction since in the circumstances the charge of collaboration could be—and was—used by knaves to pay off old scores or to demolish political opponents. The objection was to place in the most sensitive and influential positions men who had no intrinsic dedication and only an accidental loyalty to the new state. During the crucial days of 1971 some of these provincial civil servants had shown themselves to be utterly selfish, opportunistic and alienated from the mainstream of the national upsurge. It could hardly be expected that they suddenly, overnight, become selflessly dedicated to the uplift of Bangladesh or, in the circumstances, be immune to the immense opportunities for aggrandizement their pivotal positions offered in a state starting from scratch.

A Yugoslav delegation, conveying greetings from President Tito in January, 1972, exhorted Sheikh Mujib at that time to give those involved in the freedom struggle the central place in the Bangladesh administration. 'They may be inexperienced and make mistakes,' the Yugoslavs told Mujib, 'But their hearts are in the right place. They will learn quickly and they will push the country forwards.'

Mujib, however, did not see it that way. He was persuaded that the former East Pakistan bureaucrats, by their training and experience, were indispensable in the context of the overall shortage of qualified civil service alternatives. Another suggestion—and this appealed to Mujib's vanity as Bangabandhu—was to 'forgive and forget'. After all, it was argued, the government had to accommodate this sizeable group somewhere. So why not in the empty Bangladesh secretariat?

This was a woefully hollow argument. If, indeed, training and experience were the criteria for the appointment of Bangladesh's new senior bureaucrats, then the obvious place to look for them was the pool of talent made up of several hundred Bengali members of the elitist Civil Service of Pakistan. In talent, training and experience they were head and shoulders above most of the provincial officers. But in most cases their sin was to be in the wrong place—i.e. West Pakistan—when Bangladesh came into being in December 1971. The Bangabandhu charitable concept of 'forgive and forget', if at all

necessary since most of them had not collaborated, should have applied to them also. But it never did. The East Pakistan bureaucrats were in the right place at the right time and with the help of their relatives and Godfathers in the Awami League, grabbed all the best positions.

If the clock was turned back, it would not be Mujib alone who was guilty. Later Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who was put in power after Mujib's assassination, and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him, put the seal on it all. All this—resulting in corrupt, unresponsive and effete administration—had had the most disastrous consequences for Bangladesh.

Another blunder closely connected with Sheikh Mujib's misguided efforts in creating a civil service, was his public policy towards the freedom fighters. On the one hand he virtually excluded from the new Bangladesh secretariat all those FFs who were not already civil servants. On the other, he took pains to identify the FFs as a separate group—even more, a separate class—actively fanning, as the political gain required, their demands, hopes, ambitions and ultimately their frustrations.

A senior functionary of the Mujibnagar Government and a staunch supporter of Sheikh Mujib, estimated that there were approximately 300,000 Mukhti Bahini guerillas actively engaged against the Pakistani forces in 1971, both inside and outside Bangladesh. Nevertheless, in 1972, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government, as a sop to public demand, issued as many as 1,100,000 certificates designating their holders as 'Freedom Fighters in the War of Liberation'. With each certificate went the implied entitlement to a host of privileges ranging from two years seniority in government service to preferential treatment in the matter of jobs, university admissions, cash grants and the hopes of a pension. The tragedy is that, like everything else, the FF certificates became instruments of political patronage and corruption. And not all the real Mukhti Bahini got them. Those who did, quickly discovered that the FF certificate served only a decorative purpose unless it was backed up by access to the patronage being funnelled through the Awami League old-boy network. Thus a whole new embittered and emotionally-hungry class was created, both in civilian life and the armed services. Over the years it became a key element in the continuing violence in the country.

This is particularly true of the armed services.

In December, 1971, on the attainment of independence all Bengali army, navy and air force personnel and members of the East Pakistan Rifles (now East Bengal Rifles) serving with the Mukhti Bahini were designated 'Freedom Fighters' and given two years seniority in service. For the first 18 months they served as the nucleus of the new Bangladesh defence forces until their less fortunate compatriots began to arrive. These were the 35,000 Bengali officers and troops, all professional soldiers, who had been posted in West Pakistan in 1969 and 1970 and had been stranded there when the Liberation War started in March, 1971. A handful of officers, among them Major Mohammad Abul Manzoor (later Major General Manzoor, the man behind the coup that resulted in President Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981) managed to escape across the Kashmir border into India to join up with the Mukhti Bahini. All the other officers and men stranded in West Pakistan were subjected to the humiliation of being disarmed by the Pakistanis and kept secluded and secure in well-guarded camps. Though never formally designated as such by the Pakistanis, they were in effect prisoners of war suffering all the attendant adversity, tension and trauma. Undoubtedly they suffered for the independence of Bangladesh.

Major Rafiq-ul-Islam, the distinguished freedom fighter who led the Bengali

troops of the East Pakistan Rifles in a courageous stand against the Pakistan army in Chittagong in March, 1971, underscores their trauma in his book, *A Tale of Millions*. 'The situation for the Bengali army personnel stranded in Pakistan was worse,' he said. 'They were driven out of their homes with their families, herded into concentration camps, mistreated, humiliated, abused and insulted, and some were even tortured beyond imagination. Medical facilities were withheld, other amenities virtually cut off. They were forced to sell their valuables, specially gold ornaments at throw-away prices, only to buy essential items at exorbitant prices. They were left with no option. It was almost impossible for them to escape. Yet they tried. Some succeeded; others were caught, taken prisoner, isolated and tortured. The attempts of the few symbolised the spirit of all of them. Their passage through the seemingly unending days of humiliation and agony was silent and memorable. Their sacrifice is equally great ...'

All this was forgotten when the 35,000 Bengali officers and men were returned to Bangladesh in 1973 in an extended repatriation programme. Where the appellation 'FF' was considered a badge of valour, the word 'repatriate' became a term of derision for these unfortunate men. This was an unworthy slander of men whose only sin—if sin it can be called—was the accident of geography which found them against their volition on the wrong side of the sub-continent when Bangladesh was born.

Not only were the 'repatriates' superseded or passed over for promotion, but they were kept hanging around on the 'attached list' of the army. All their appointments were 'ad hoc'. As such for over two years and in some cases three, none of them could get their promotions, seniority and the regularisation of their service. Thus uncertainty about jobs, promotions and appointments undermined military morale terribly.

The differentiation between the FFs and 'repatriates' also politicised the defence forces and riddled them with factionalism and indiscipline. Ultimately it would lead to the killing of Sheikh Mujib, the Jail Four and President Ziaur Rahman. They were all 'FFs' and, ironically, it was the 'FFs' who were responsible for their slaying.

Towards the end of March, 1972, according to a hot rumour making the rounds in Dhaka, Mujib was grossly overworked and 'in the interests of health and administrative efficiency' was about to reappoint Tajuddin Ahmad as Prime Minister. Mujib, it was said, would step down to reorganise the Awami League and act the Father figure. When I asked Tajuddin about it, his answer was precise and telling: 'Someone is trying to cut my throat!' Mujib's own reaction to my inquiries was equally severe. 'Nonsense,' he told me, 'do they think I am not capable of running the government?' The rumour, which was obviously inspired by interested quarters, had the desired effect. Henceforth Mujib was all the more suspicious of Tajuddin and had him carefully watched.

Mujib was to soldier on in the hot seat and obviously he was not as happy as he pretended to be. All his life had been spent in the field, face-to-face with the people. Now he was isolated from them. The official restraints that were imposed on him, the demands on his time made by matters of state, and the high fence that surrounded him at all times were indeed galling. He would sometimes complain about them. But then this complex personality would also gloriously bask in the spotlight at the centre stage, savouring every nuance of the protocol and all the perks that went with it—his personal standard, the honour guard, the foreign dignitaries coming to court, the long black limousines. Once I rashly asked him why he didn't drive a smaller car, setting an

example of the austerity to which he exhorted his people. Before answering Mujib gave me a long, dirty look. When he saw no malice was intended, he smiled and told me: 'Surely the Prime Minister of Bangladesh can afford to drive in a Mercedes!'

Mujib never fully awakened to the realities of the new dispensation over which he presided. The dramatic events of the nine months preceding the birth of Bangladesh and all the trauma and patriotic fervour that it generated—would remain a blank spot in his consciousness. He would never fully know it because his vibrant personality had not experienced it. Mujib, after all, was essentially a projectionist, a prism translating light to rainbow. Total isolation in prison had been an obliterating experience. Time stood still for him while the people moved on to a new life and new hope. So when he emerged from the 'darkness to the light and the sunshine of a million victorious smiles', Mujib, true to form, continued exactly from where he had left off. He did not have the capacity to catch up. Nor did he try. His record in office underscores this dismal fact. He blundered terribly. Thus the formative days of Bangladesh were distorted. Within six months disenchantment set in.

Recalling these events, Major Farook told me: 'If he had asked us to eat grass or to dig the earth with our bare hands we would have done it for him. But look how he behaved!'

Rip Van Winkle had not only risen from the wrong side of the bed but had also got off to a false start.

#### Notes

1. Message to Mujib in London, 8.1.72.
2. Yatindra Bhatnagar (quoted by S. S. Sethi, *The Decisive War*, New Delhi, p 155).
3. *The Guardian*, London, 10.1.1972.
4. Press Conference in London, 10.1.1972.
5. *The Times*, London, 10.1.72.
6. Sethi, *The Decisive War*, p 109.
7. *The Guardian*, London, 10.1.79.
8. D. R. Mankekar, *Pakistan Cut to Size*, New Delhi, pp 139/140.
9. *The Sunday Times*, London, 16.1.1972
10. *ibid*.
11. Mohammad Ayub Khan and K. Subramaniam, *The Liberation War*, New Delhi, pp 51/52.

## III

# The Decline of the Demi-God

*The army will not fire on the people; but if you press it, it might take action against you and the ruling clique!*

—Abdur Rab

The scene: Paltan Maidan, Dhaka. The date: 17 September, 1972. The occasion: The first public protest against Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's rule.

Eight months after he had taken over as prime minister, the tide of popularity had begun to run out for Mujib. The great agitator, the champion of the people's grievance, the beloved Bangabandhu on whom the most fulsome praise had been lavished, had now become the target of criticism from an outraged public.

More than 100,000 people had gathered to hear another powerful rabble rouser bitterly denounce the prime minister for betraying the Bengalis and failing to fulfil pledges made before independence. He was Abdur Rab, the student leader and former Mukhti Bahini freedom fighter who was once one of Mujib's staunchest supporters. Now Rab was telling the crowd: 'Mujib said no one would be allowed to die of starvation after independence. Now people are dying for want of food.' Egged on by the irate gathering Rab ticked off a long string of grievances—soaring prices which put food and other necessities beyond reach of the people, shortages, market manipulation, official corruption, nepotism, mounting unemployment, mass arrests and beatings by the police, an irresponsive government, a muzzled press. 'The Awami Leaguers are more corrupt and much worse than the Pakistanis ever were,' Rab declared, in a punchy summation of public sentiment that brought the crowd screaming to its feet. 'You have been arresting us and using all sorts of violence against us. In your speeches you have used the metaphor of weapons. But have you ever used a gun? We know how to use real weapons.' Then calling for the dismissal of corrupt cabinet ministers and officials and the formation of a national government, Rab prophetically warned Mujib: 'The army will not fire on the people; but if you press it, it might take action against you and the ruling clique!'

The wheel had turned full circle for the Bengalis. Once more there was an outcry against exploitation and repression. Only this time, ironically, Rab was echoing the charges Mujib had hurled against the Pakistan government eighteen months earlier.

For Mujib it was an especially bitter pill. Three days earlier he had returned from an extended visit to London where he had undergone a painful operation for the removal of gall stones. He was still a sick man and very exhausted. A ten day convalescence in Geneva, away from the crowds of importuning Bengalis who had descended on him in London, had failed to improve his disposition. During his enforced absence the government was formally headed by Syed Nazrul Islam, the deputy prime minister. But he had neither the intelligence nor the political muscle to assert himself. The savage in-fighting among



the Awami League leaders had re-surfaced. Cabinet ministers, like so many defiant war lords, went their separate ways. In London and in Geneva Mujib had once more been overwhelmed by panic calls from Dhaka. For seven weeks Bangladesh was at the mercy of God and the telephone.<sup>1</sup> Now Mujib was back and after an orchestrated welcoming, was publicly pilloried on the Paltan Maidan.

It all came as a nasty jolt to his ego; but for Mujib there was no contrition, only a shifting of blame from the master to his dogs. 'I'm with the people,' he declared on his return as though disassociating himself from the party. He turned on his party men, dismissing 19 members of Parliament for 'smuggling, nepotism and corruption'.

This unprecedented purge of the ruling party was well received. When Mujib wrathfully announced 'Nobody will be spared; I will take action against anyone who is guilty', many saw this as an indication that the old dynamism of the hustings had returned and they ardently believed that given the opportunity Mujib would yet vindicate the public trust. A Bengali journalist told me: 'Leader will straighten things out. Now you will see the fun.' That would be another promise belied. The events, however, did mark a new phase in Mujib's decline. Henceforth he increasingly temporised with all sorts of political stunts, deluding himself that bravado and showmanship would substitute for his deficiencies as the executive head of government. In the process he discarded everything Bangladesh was supposed to represent: constitutionalism, the rule of law, freedom of speech, the right to dissent, equal opportunity. Gradually tragedy in Bangladesh settled into permanence.

If the new state did not collapse within the first eight months of its founding it was only due to the efforts of the international community. UNROD, the United Nations Relief Operation in Dhaka, was an unprecedented rescue mission both in magnitude and effectiveness, one of UN's unsung success stories. Even the name signified a practical effort to cut through formalities, legalities and red tape, to come to terms with the explosive reality of 75 million people in the gravest distress. Since the area, hitherto East Pakistan, was still formally recognised as part of Pakistan, a member state, the UN operation could not be designated as aid to Bangladesh. To give it the East Pakistan label would similarly have been offensive to the sensitive Bengalis and their international friends. So the UN Relief Operation to Dhaka was launched and with it the greatest single international outpouring of money, food, equipment and technical assistance known to date. At least twenty countries were represented in Dhaka with men and material. Money, men and supplies also came in from the ICRC (The International Committee for the Red Cross in Geneva) and its affiliates, particularly the Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross Societies, and from a number of German and British charities such as Caritas, War on Want, Save the Children Fund and Christian Aid.

UNROD coordinated this gigantic operation. It had some difficult moments. Sometimes there were some hilarious boners, even heated debates about the type of operation it should be—and there was some corruption of course. But its ultimate success is judged by the fact that not only did it save Bangladesh from collapse, but UNROD was also generally free from contention and re-priming by the local government and the people it sought to help. Although food was scarce and available on the open market only at a mounting premium, UNROD ensured that the statutory ration of rice was maintained. Bengalis did not die of starvation while UNROD organised the supply and distribution of food.

I remember an enormous chart hanging on the wall of the Dhanmandi

office of Dr. Viktor Umbricht, UNROD's director. Popularly called 'the bed sheet' (it could easily cover a fair-sized bed), it served as a ready reckoner for the war damage, the money/supplies available for rehabilitation from donor countries and the various task forces in the field. UNROD estimated there were ten million people destitute in the rural areas and another two million in towns. At least 1.5 million houses had to be rebuilt. But the immediate requirement in the spring of 1972 was \$78 million for housing and food; \$80 million for additional food imports; \$200 million for industrial and agricultural inputs and equipment; \$45 million for housing materials; \$15 million for railway repairs; \$13 million for inland water transport and \$6 million for schools.

UNROD had its own wireless network and transport system with the blue United Nations flag flown on minibulkers, trucks, helicopters, aircraft and barges. Russian and Indian navy salvage teams cleared the wrecks blocking Chittagong and Khulna ports and the Chalna anchorage. British army engineers repaired the big bridges in the North. Indian technicians helped to restart the railways. Scandinavian doctors and nurses worked round the clock to control epidemics of smallpox, cholera and typhoid. There were hundreds of East European engineering specialists repairing war damage. An American specialist working entirely with local dock labour and the most primitive equipment set a record for clearing food ships in Khulna. French and Japanese technicians helped to restart the mills.

Correspondents wanting a quick run-down on the way things were shaping would make a bee line for UNROD headquarters where the amiable Director of Information, Fernando Jaques da Silva, would provide instant answers. This remarkable Brazilian, who after-hours would regale us with refreshment and his guitar, did much to keep the massive rehabilitation effort in perspective. While spelling out what the UN specialists were doing, he would quietly promote the idea of close cooperation between UNROD and the Bangladesh government and in no way discount the latter's overall responsibility. Thus, to the government's satisfaction, press reports invariably gave the impression of Bangladesh achievement whereas UNROD in fact was doing all the pushing and most of the running.

One evening during an informal conversation over dinner, Dr. Umbricht appeared to be concerned about a meeting he had earlier in the day in the Bangladesh Foreign Office. 'I can't understand why,' he told me with evident exasperation, 'if the government is so anxious to join the United Nations and receive international recognition, it is refusing to attend a UN-sponsored conference.' It transpired that Bangladesh, though still far from being admitted to membership of the world body, had been extended an official invitation to participate in the conference on the environment in Stockholm. The invitation was unconditional and would have marked Bangladesh's first appearance on an international forum. Nevertheless Dr. Umbricht, as the UN representative in Dhaka, had been called to the Foreign Office that morning and given a letter expressing the government's inability to attend. The formal excuse was that it was not fully geared to participate. But Dr. Umbricht had been privately informed about the real reason. Apparently, the German Democratic Republic, which had rushed in to open the first diplomatic office in Dhaka and like Bangladesh was not a member of the United Nations, had also received an invitation to Stockholm but only as an Observer. Because of this qualification, the GDR refused to attend. So it had been suggested to Bangladesh by its East European friends that as a gesture of solidarity with the countries which had given ardent support to the struggle for independence, it should also refrain from attending. The Foreign Office at that time was presided over by Abdus

Samad Azad, the man with the 'pro-Russian' label who had summarily replaced Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed. Azad decided to make the gesture to the East Europeans and after issuing the required directive to the permanent head of the Foreign Office, S. A. Karim, flew off on an official visit to Nepal.

Next morning, which was a Sunday, I walked over to Bangababan for a quiet chat with Mujib and casually brought up the question of the rejected invitation without mentioning my source. Mujib was in an upstairs bedroom chatting with Law Minister Kamal Hussain while his servant vigorously massaged his legs. That was Mujib's way of relaxing. My question seemed to disturb him. Abruptly sitting up on the bed Mujib told me with unconcealed irritation: 'What nonsense are you talking? Have you also started picking up bazaar rumours? We have not received any UN invitation so how can we reject it?' Properly chastened and smarting from the outburst, I wondered why Dr. Umbricht was trying to sell me a line. In that mood I looked him up on my return to Hotel International. He was both annoyed and puzzled by the imputation of Mujib's denial. To prove the point he had made earlier, he showed me a copy of the politely worded Foreign Office refusal.

I went back to Mujib that evening and told him that far from being bazaar gossip I could prove that the great prime minister was not aware of what was going on under his very nose in the Foreign Office. The upshot was that Mujib sent for the Foreign Secretary and after establishing the truth of the matter, reversed the decision. Dr. Umbricht was warmly received by the Prime Minister and told that the Bangladesh Ambassador to Stockholm had been instructed to attend. Two days later when Mujib confronted the Foreign Minister on his return from Nepal, Abdus Samad Azad hotly denied having issued the order. Mujib knew this to be a barefaced lie. Nevertheless he accepted Azad's contention that Foreign Secretary S. A. Karim had acted without his knowledge. The latter, in disgust, asked to be relieved of his post and went to New York as the Resident Observer at UN headquarters.

By the summer of 1972 everything was going wrong for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Rice is the staple food of the Bengalis and its price is always the definitive indicator of the public mood in Bangladesh. When the price is low the administration, however unpopular it may be in other ways, can hope to muddle through. When the price is high all the danger signals start flashing and it is generally assumed that the government is on its way out. By June, 1972, the price of paddy, the unhusked rice, had soared to 120 Takkas per maund (80 lbs) in the 'hats' or country markets. That was almost double what it had been under Pakistani rule and well above the crisis level for Bangladesh. Mujib was gravely embarrassed and tried to explain it away as the consequences of the war. But hungry villagers would not be fobbed off with such an excuse when other essentials such as paraffin, cooking oil, salt and soap were also difficult to come by because of the outrageous market manipulation. The country was in the grip of a severe money famine since unemployment, which had risen spectacularly during the liberation war, showed no signs of declining during the peace. In the public mind the Awami League government was not merely corrupt. It was considered to be totally degenerate. And, adding to the overall distress there was a pervasive lawlessness and violence.

Armed gangs openly plundered and killed. It was a common sight in the districts to see groups of bare-footed young men in lungis and 'gangis' or undershirts, sporting military caps and rifles, ambling through the market place. They had their will—be it eggs, fish, vegetables, cash or jewellery. Even Dhaka, the capital, was not immune to their depredations. Longhaired boys with green

or black berets, dark glasses and Castro beards would tear through the streets in stolen jeeps and cars. The number plates were only casually plastered with mud. Sometimes they carried rifles and sten guns. Sometimes not. But if they didn't get their way when demands were made in shops or houses the intended victims knew they would return after dark with the guns.

Mujib had dismally failed to retrieve the vast quantities of arms and ammunition which had remained in private hands in the aftermath of the war. His efforts in this direction had been inept from the start.

A little more than a week after taking over as Prime Minister and obviously acting on the advice of his non-combatant Awami League Cabinet ministers and the bureaucrats of the '16th Division', who both feared the freedom fighters, Mujib suddenly issued a public directive that all unauthorised arms should be surrendered within ten days. It was another case of the demi-god commanding 'let there be rain'. The folly of the order was immediately evident. Apart from the fact that the government was then incapable of enforcing its writ, the ending of the amnesty period coincided with the festival of Eid-ul-Azha when the country is shut down for at least three days. In this case it was the first Eid after independence and there was an immense pressure on everyone to return to their village homes for the festivities. Consequently the skeletal administration had begun to slow down. Even if it had wanted to, the government was not able to get the message effectively circulated in the countryside or for that matter arrange for the collection of arms had they been forthcoming. The timing was all wrong. Mujib was compelled to extend the deadline to the end of the month.

But there was a deeper reason for the directive being ignored. The proud, patriotic young freedom fighters of the Mukhti Bahini were willing to fall behind Mujib's leadership if they could be assured of responsible positions in the new state they had helped to create. But their willingness and goodwill were undermined by Mujib's own actions. First, he had imposed his Awami League cadres, who had little or no part in the fighting, as the eyes, ears and channels of government authority in the areas which the freedom fighters had controlled for several months. Guerrilla leaders, operating under cover, had 'governed' sizeable chunks of territory during the liberation war. They advised the population on resistance tactics, collected 'taxes' to sustain the struggle, even presided over 'courts' where justice may have been rough and ready but invariably evenhanded. Now they found themselves supplanted by Awami Leaguers whose role in the freedom struggle had been minimal, if not suspect, and who now flaunted themselves as the local barons.

Secondly, by adopting en masse the old East Pakistan bureaucracy—the notorious '16th Division'—as the administration of Bangladesh, Mujib did not only shut the door on the freedom fighters. He also laid them open to victimisation by the turncoat police and district officers who had only recently been the targets of the guerrillas. Mujib, of course, did offer to absorb the Mukhti Bahini in the armed forces, the national militia and police or to provide grants to those who wished to return to their studies. Some did take up the offer. About 8000 of them were absorbed in the national militia. But by and large the freedom fighters found these options, which were never clearly spelled out, distinctly uninviting. At best they seemed to imply subsistence level jobs for them, the true blues, while the plums went to others less deserving. So they clung to their guns. If nothing else they were the best form of reassurance in uncertain times.

Before the deadline ran out Mujib's political advisers after a great deal of negotiation, persuaded some guerrilla groups to ceremonially hand over their



weapons to the Prime Minister. Two TV spectacles were organised for this purpose. The most impressive of these was in Tangail, and involved Kader Siddiqui, the 26-year-old guerrilla leader nicknamed 'Tiger'. He had won great distinction during the liberation war. It was a day to remember. Ten miles into Tangail the road on either side of Mujib's motorcade was lined at regular intervals with elements of the 'Kader Bahini'. They were Tiger's men, each in a khaki uniform, armed with a rifle and standing stiffly to attention. Inside the town and in the vast grounds where the ceremony was held the force and the discipline were equally impressive. This was the Tiger's territory and he was making sure Mujib got the point.

Wearing khaki uniform, his long, bushy hair standing out on either side of his cap, Kader Siddiqui ceremonially escorted Mujib past a long display of rifles, sten guns, and at least a dozen mortars. He picked up an automatic rifle and laid it at the Prime Minister's feet in a gesture of disarmament. Then taking rice from an aide, Tiger knelt before Mujib, a feudal lord pledging allegiance to his king. He swore he would be loyal to Mujib as long as he lived. Many others had taken the pledge before him; many since then. Only Tiger Siddiqui has kept the faith. He is now an outlaw.

Mujib, who was overcome with emotion, and the officials who accompanied him would remember that day for another reason. The massive display of fighting strength, discipline and dedication to a man other than Bangabandhu would haunt them in the days to come. The sycophants would pour poison in Mujib's ears and he, more fearful than jealous, would try to crush the 'Bahini'. But this would only push them underground. The surrender ceremonies had more propaganda effect than practical value. About 30,000 guns were handed in, 70,000 less than the government expected. Neither Mujib nor Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmad and General Ziaur Rahman who followed him were able to mop up the rest.

Another reason for the chaos in the country was the manner in which the Collaborators' Order was implemented. Promulgated on 24 January, 1972, the Order was intended to bring to book those who had actively collaborated with the Pakistan army and government during the nine months of 1971 following the army crackdown. In the circumstances obtaining at that time it was almost a merciful alternative to uncontrolled blood-letting in the aftermath of the liberation war. No one can fault the Bengalis for seeking to punish those who assisted the savagery perpetrated on their people. The Israelis are still doing it 40 years after Hitler. What is inexcusable is the way in which an understandable, even justifiable, emotion was allowed to deteriorate into a capricious witch-hunt and the paying off of old scores.

The main thrust of the Order was directed against Bengali politicians who had cooperated with the Pakistan authorities (such as the former Governor of East Pakistan, Dr. A. M. Malik, and his law minister Jasimuddin Ahmad) and the pro-Pakistan armed gangs such as the Razakars and the notorious Al Badar. The latter had been involved in acts of murder, rape, arson and looting and as such the guilty ones deserved to be brought to justice. But it was invidious to single out the collaborating politicians for punishment when the entire civilian administration of East Pakistan had not only been immunized from retribution but had also been installed as the new administration of Bangladesh. When all is said and done these government functionaries and policemen were in a natural position to collaborate—and collaborate many of them did. Yet the Collaborators' Order, with minor exceptions, was not directed against them.

At the same time the Awami Leaguers found the Order a convenient in-

strument to pay off old scores against political opponents and to silence the opposition. At the end of November, 1972, the Chief Whip of the Awami League, Shah Moazzam Hussain, complained that those who were trying to oppose the party in the forthcoming general elections were the same collaborators who had sided with the Pakistan army junta.<sup>2</sup> Even some '16th Division' officers seized the opportunity to hit back at unfortunate individuals who had crossed them at some time or other. All they had to do to ensure an opponent's ruin was to denounce him as a collaborator. The government did the rest. He was clamped in jail. His property was seized—all before the charge was investigated. Understandably some tried to defend themselves against this misdirected zeal. And since guns were readily available the violence spread. Soon the jails began to fill. On 3 October, 1972, the Home Minister publicly stated that 41,800 people had been arrested under the Collaborators' Order.

The first collaborators trials were held in Jessore. M. R. Akhtar ('Mukul') relates an interesting incident in his book 'Mujibur Rakta Lal'. The man in the dock, who had been accused of being a Razakar, stood silent when the magistrate repeatedly asked him, 'Are you guilty or not guilty?' In exasperation some lawyers in the court shouted at him, 'Why don't you plead?' The man finally answered: 'Sir, I'm thinking what to say.'

Magistrate: 'What are you thinking?'

Accused: (pointing to magistrate) 'I'm thinking that the person who occupies that chair is the one who recruited me as a Razakar. Now he has become a magistrate. It's a cruel twist of fate that I am in the dock and he is conducting my trial.'

Another interesting comment comes from Robert MacLennan the British MP who was an observer at the trials. 'In the dock the defendants are scarcely more pitiable than the succession of confused prosecution witnesses driven (by the 88-year-old defence counsel) to admit that they, too, served the Pakistan government but are now ready to swear blind that their real loyalty was to the government of Bangladesh in exile.'

The whole thing was a mockery of justice. The government finally put an end to it but not before the disorder intensified.

As the violence continued to escalate in the summer of 1972, at least 36 people were officially reported killed and another 80 injured in a riot in the port of Khulna. (Unofficial estimates, which were closer to the truth, put the death toll over 2000.) The incident is noteworthy because it involved the first of Mujib's experiments with private armies. This was the Lal Bahini, a paramilitary group raised by one of the Prime Minister's henchmen to 'control' the industrial areas. They became too officious in their task and the riot was a result of the confrontation with the police.

Not long after that Mujib, again in typical Bangabandhu fashion, issued another two-week ultimatum. This time it was to hoarders and smugglers in Dhaka to surrender illegally-held food stocks and arms. After the ultimatum ran out without noticeable result, checkpoints were established at cross roads. Police and militia searched motor vehicles and pedal rickshaws. Others raided shops and warehouses for hidden food stocks and stolen goods. The results were disappointing. A lot of small fry was netted but the big fish got away. They always do. They were of course part and parcel of the government and the ruling Awami League.

Corruption is not only a Bangladesh phenomenon. But few countries in the world have been so riddled with corruption as the new state was from the moment of its founding. It was as if a plague of locusts had descended on the

country and set about devouring anything that offered the slightest margin of profit. And since Bangladesh was starting anew, there were endless opportunities for aggrandizement.

Instances of corruption could fill several volumes. They range from petty cupidity to outrageous criminality. It's a matter of record that a certain head of a Bangladesh diplomatic mission, who had made a great display of his piety, solemnly swore an affidavit that his grandson was his son in order to claim an additional family allowance of about £50 a month. Another diplomat charged a flat 5% on all government purchases made through his Mission. One of Mujib's senior officers was so adept at manipulating the food market that he arranged, first a shortage of salt, and then a famine of chillies before flooding the market with imports of these items brought in by his own cargo vessels. Others manipulated the rice trade, the edible oils market. Still others organised the smuggling of jute and rice to India, and through agents in London and Singapore controlled the fantastic Bangladesh black market in foreign exchange. Corruption was not the preserve of the Awami Leaguers and bureaucrats, but these two groups were ideally placed to make immense fortunes because they were the government. Some operated through relatives; some flagrantly in their own names. Others saw no harm in getting the Public Works Department to convert their modest village homes into well-equipped mansions.

Mujib, who had a proprietary attitude to the country, had no need for money. His preoccupation was power. No one has produced evidence to substantiate rumours that he had amassed a vast fortune abroad. But it is known that some members of his family, particularly his son Kamal, were not immune to helping themselves to the substantial gifts that came their way or to get investment-free partnerships in trading ventures which seemed to attract lucrative import business. After Mujib's assassination Brigadier Manzoor, the Chief of the General Staff under General Zia, citing examples of corruption, told me Mujib's brother had rapidly built up an immense fortune by cornering large numbers of barges and other river craft. But let it be said that in this respect Mujib's family did not distinguish itself any more than the scores of prominent Awami Leaguers, Cabinet Ministers and senior civil servants. Corrupt, money-grabbing people were to be found everywhere even among some of the retired majors involved in Mujib's killing. Those who took less pointed a finger at those who took more. In such a convoluted society wrongdoing was not in question—guilt was a matter of degree.

The fault lay as much in the system as in the quality of men who had come to prominence in Bangladesh. Since the country had to be re-started from a collapsed position after the war, the government had perforce to control almost every aspect of life in Bangladesh. It soon developed into a system of licences based on an economy of want. Those who at the various stages controlled the issue of licences were therefore in a pre-eminent position to make their demands. Graft soon became a way of life. As my Bengali friends still say 'If you want to succeed you must pay.' Things got out of hand when those who controlled the system used the licences themselves to multiply their profits many times over.

In the matter of personnel, the Awami League did not have a creditable record. In fact some ministers in Prime Minister Suhrawardy's cabinet which ruled Pakistan in 1957 had shown themselves to be more corrupt than anything known in Pakistan till that time. When the party was installed in power in Bangladesh it was inevitable that old habits should be given full play. The doors to corruption were opened wide when Mujib installed Awami Leaguers

as his eyes and ears in every district, sub-division and 'thana' (group of villages). The intention obviously was to keep a tight grip on the country. But the party men had to be paid off in patronage. When this took the form of distribution outlets for food, consumer goods and industrial raw materials, everyone took a cut.

Then again, Mujib, rather curiously, reinstated several senior officers with established reputations for corruption who had been dismissed from the Pakistan civil service. Some of them were placed in positions of influence near the throne. It would, however, be unfair to single out these men for blame. As pointed out earlier, many other officers had little or no commitment to Bangladesh. As they say in London pubs: they were only 'here for the beer'—and made no bones about it.

Closely entwined with the official corruption was the colossal smuggling of food and jute out of the country into India. The practice existed long before the birth of Bangladesh. With more than 1000 miles of border cutting through swampland, dense jungles and winding rivers of the delta country, smugglers operated with impunity from the early days of Pakistan. Merchants in the rice and jute growing areas of East Pakistan, where prices were low, were attracted by the Indian high-profit markets in metropolitan Calcutta and its industrial suburbs. Major Abdur Rashid, one of the two ring leaders of the coup against Mujib, had evidence of this when, as a Pakistan army captain, he was temporarily posted to border patrol duties with the East Pakistan Rifles in 1959. Rashid found his fellow officers deeply involved with the smugglers and when he took action against one of them he was summarily returned to his old regiment in West Pakistan. When Bangladesh came into being the smuggling operation greatly expanded, one reason being that border vigilance had become very relaxed because of the cordiality between the two countries.

Toni Hagen, at one time head of UNROD, reported early in 1972, that 'Bangladesh is like a sieve suspended in India.' Many merchants found it more advantageous to export the rice across the border where they got almost half as much again for their crops.<sup>3</sup> Not long after that Dr. K. U. Ahmad, a Bengali lecturer in Brunel University in England, after making a detailed study of the problem came to the conclusion: 'Food prices are soaring in Bangladesh chiefly because supplies sent in from abroad to relieve widespread hunger are being smuggled out to the Indian market by Bangladeshi traders aided by corrupt government officials.'<sup>4</sup> After Mujib's assassination the Bangladesh government itself said that 'smuggling of goods across the border during the three and a half years of independence cost approximately 60,000 million Takkas<sup>1</sup> (£2000 million). The goods smuggled out of the country were mostly jute, food-grains and materials imported from abroad.'<sup>5</sup>

To the government's own estimates of smuggling (£2000 million sterling) must be added the vast sums funnelled out of the country through the black market in foreign exchange and the 'side money' (commissions) skimmed off the large purchases of rice, sugar, cement and other commodities made on government account. Corruption in Bangladesh was therefore of a magnitude exceeding anything known anywhere.

It was fashionable and politically expedient for Bangladeshis to blame India for its economic ills. Anyone who had access to the inner workings of Bangababan would know that while Mujib and his ministers publicly extolled the close ties with India, they also privately made it the scapegoat for their own inadequacies. The Indians cannot be absolved of blame for some of the incidents that have vexed relations between the two countries, and it is a fact that Indian merchants benefited enormously from the clandestine trade with

Bangladesh. But it is also a fact that the Bangladeshis themselves did the actual smuggling and had a proportionate share of the loot. The point was underscored at a cocktail party given by a Western diplomat in Dhaka in February, 1974. There were some local editors and journalists present and one of the latter was waxing hot about how the Indians were 'bleeding the country'. Finally our host had had enough. 'Tell me,' he asked this man, 'do the Indians come all the way into Bangladesh and carry off the rice and jute or do the Bangladeshis carry it out to them?' That was the end of the argument.

From the start the governments of Bangladesh and India had tried to prevent the business houses of Calcutta from dominating the economy of Bangladesh. To this end they signed an agreement in January 1972, putting all trade and economic exchanges on a state-to-state basis. Thus any unacceptable entanglement could have been pinched off at the start had it been found necessary. But there were some drawbacks and curiously as pointed out earlier, it was the cordiality making for easy movement across the border which ultimately undermined efforts to control the flow of commodities from Bangladesh to India. Clearly the flood of goods smuggled could not have developed if it was not supported, in the first instance, by corrupt politicians, officials and traders in Bangladesh, and secondly, by corrupt politicians, officials and merchants in India.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in a moment of introspection, publicly put the finger on the malady: 'Who takes bribes? Who indulges in smuggling? Who becomes a foreign agent? Who transfers money abroad? Who resorts to hoarding? It's being done by us the five percent of the people who are educated. We are the bribe takers, the corrupt elements . . . It seems that society is worm infested.'<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless Mujib adopted a cavalier attitude to all this corruption. Once when a leader of another political party drew his attention to a particularly seamy scandal involving one of his ministers, Mujib shrugged it off with the remark, 'Yes, I know he is a greedy bastard.' This makes clear that it was not the lack of accountability that allowed corruption to spread, but the fact that Mujib did not enforce this accountability. It's the price he paid to retain a hold on anyone he thought to be dangerous to his own position. Mujib knew which minister and which officer took bribes, who manipulated the markets and who were the king-pins behind the smuggler gangs and currency racketeers. His intelligence services kept tabs on everyone. To their reports was added the gossip and tattling that poured down like monsoon rain on Gonobaban. Mujib carefully noted it all and used it when necessary to silence the guilty ones. Once a man became vulnerable he ceased to be a threat and he was tolerated as long as he kept in line. This tactic is as old as politics itself and no different from what is practised in varying degrees in other countries, and in Bangladesh itself, after Mujib's death. But while it did give Mujib a hold on people it did not guarantee their loyalty. Those who made money resented the idea that others were allowed to make a lot more. Thus no one was entirely satisfied and they all eventually turned on Mujib.

The haemorrhage of national resources almost killed off the new state at its founding. By the end of 1973 Bangladesh was bankrupt, though more than two billion dollars in international aid had been pumped into it. The tragedy is that the haemorrhage was not staunched after Mujib's death. Some corrupt politicians were removed from positions of influence but were replaced by influence-peddlers of another kind. Corrupt civil servants to a large extent remained untouched; so also did the well-heeled business sharks operating on the periphery of the palace. Like the rivers, they seemed to go on forever. And

if smuggling was halted temporarily it was only because the new tensions between Bangladesh and India made for extreme vigilance on both sides of the border. Mujib's successors were hardly in a position to point the finger at him. Their attempts at cleaning up have at best been cosmetic.

Bangladesh would never have been brought to such straits in so short a period had it not been for the unbelievable sycophancy which filled Gonobaban and Bangababan like the clouds of intoxicating vapours in an opium den. Sycophancy is on a par with maladministration, corruption and smuggling as the prime cause for the decline of both Mujib and Bangladesh.

The Greeks and Romans used to say a god is nothing without worshippers. Mujib, the demi-god, had these in abundance. They clung to him like scabious leeches, greedily sucking all available patronage while at the same time isolating him from reality and the people. There were all kinds of 'durbaris'. Some were inoffensively obsequious, their only purpose being to demonstrate they were on the right side of the fence. Others were outrageously servile and grasping. They flattered Mujib, indulged his every mood and instantly echoed each utterance from the lips of the Leader. They aped the way he dressed. Mujib-style jackets over white cotton pyjamas became the uniform of the 'in' group. Mujib's picture blossomed on postage stamps and on currency notes, calendars, desk ornaments and daily on the front pages of almost every newspaper.

A bust of the Bangabandhu would also have adorned a cell in the Dhaka jail had not the 'durbaris' intervened. During his long career in the opposition, Mujib had spent more than ten years in solitary confinement, most of them in a condemned cell in the Dhaka central jail. He proudly called it his second home. In 1974 a senior officer of the Jails Department came up with the idea that it would be a fitting tribute to the Bangabandhu to place a bust of him in the cell. Accordingly one of Bangladesh's well-known sculptresses, Shamin, was commissioned to do the bust of Mujib for a fee of 20,000 Takkas (about £750). She came up with a large, very presentable work in bronze. The jail authorities spent another large sum building an appropriate pedestal and preparing the cell for the great occasion. Then they invited Mujib to the formal commemoration. When the invitation reached Gonobaban, Mujib was greatly touched by the gesture. The sycophants, however, were indignant. It would be 'insulting and inauspicious', they advised Mujib, to 'have Bangabandhu put in jail'. Mujib began to waver. When his family joined in opposing the idea, the bust was quietly removed from the cell and placed in storage.

The worst sycophants were among Mujib's advisers and ministers. Among the former were Tufail and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, Mujib's nephew who would also die with him. Most prominent among the latter was Tahiruddin Thakur, the Minister of State for Information. Thakur was once a journalist, and would later play a shadowy role in Mujib's assassination. He geared the entire government information machinery, TV, radio and press to extolling the virtues of Mujib. He also distinguished himself by extreme public obeisance to his master.

Thakur's attitude so revolted some of his officers that one of them, an executive of Bangladesh TV, on one occasion hit on the idea of the camera focusing on Thakur as he bent down to touch Mujib's feet in a gesture of fealty at Dhaka airport. That night TV viewers in Dhaka were regaled with this spectacle of ministerial obeisance. But it is a measure of the national degradation at that time that instead of showing up this nauseous personal debasement as it was intended to, the touching of feet henceforth became the form for the durbaris. It inflated Mujib's ego—to the point where he took severe note of those who dared not to touch his feet.

Only one minister, Tajuddin Ahmad who was in charge of Finance, had the courage to stand up to Mujib publicly. In November 1974, on his return from an international conference, Tajuddin publicly criticised the government for incompetence and mismanagement. In the circumstances it was akin to political suicide and probably reflected the desperation he felt. On being summarily dismissed, Tajuddin immediately announced his retirement from politics. One other minister, General M. A. G. Osmani, who successively held the portfolios of Defence, Civil Aviation and Shipping, was never comfortable in Mujib's Cabinet, and in July, 1974, asked to be relieved of his portfolios. The other ministers, whatever may have been their private opinions, did not show hesitation in falling into line behind Sheikh Mujib whatever he did. The same is true of some senior civil servants and military officers. They had no reason to take sides, but take sides they did for rapid promotions. The numerous turncoats in evidence after Mujib's assassination underscores this sad story.

In their own way each of his principal political advisers made notable contributions to the Mujib legend. Tufail was the first to give him the grandiose title of Bangabandhu, the Friend of the Bengalis. That was during the Bengali upsurge against Pakistan and Tufail's influence with the emotional leader was carried over when Bangladesh became a reality and Mujib the Prime Minister. He was appointed Mujib's political secretary and in that capacity was one of the most powerful shadows behind the throne. The other adviser, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, was the author of 'The Four Pillars of Mujibism—Nationalism, Socialism, Democracy and Secularism.' These were bombastically enshrined in the constitution as the 'Fundamental Principles of State Policy.' But in actual terms of guiding concepts they remained illusory, if not grotesquely debased by contrary practices. For propaganda purposes the Four Pillars of Mujibism were eminently suitable as banners for the long march to 'Sonar Bangla' or the Golden Bengal. But Bangladesh in fact was going nowhere and thus they assumed merely a decorative purpose. In his time Mujib would shoot down every one of the 'pillars' and Moni and Tufail would cheer him on. But this did not deter the durbaris from taking up the chant.

The 'principles' were developed into the cult of 'Mujibism', complete with badges, books, essays and newspaper articles proclaiming and explaining the 'new philosophy'. Even Mujib was embarrassed by what was done in his name. When the author of a voluminous treatise on 'Mujibism' ceremonially presented him with a copy, Mujib self-consciously accepted the book with the remark, 'Yes, I'm sure I'll find it very interesting.'

Some people got hopelessly tangled in their enthusiasm. On 25 September, 1974, Shahidul Haq, the Editor of Bangladesh Times cabled this despatch to his newspaper from New York:

'It seemed all so incredible yet so convincing. The moment of triumph for Bengali nation and more particularly for Bangabandhu came at 3.30 pm today when UN General Assembly reverberated to an impatient appeal for universal peace by him.

'It was the first time that someone spoke in Bengali in the 29-year history of UN. And it was only in the fitness of things that the speaker was Bangabandhu. As a leader of a delegation put it, the parliament of man was "totally captivated by the sound melody, serenity, onrush and aural majesty of language and delivery" of which most members did not know a word of...'

Mujib's isolation was completed by his own Awami League party. When he took over as Prime Minister in January, 1972, Mujib installed his party men

everywhere, making them his eyes and ears and hoping they would open up a two-way channel of communication. But in their outright scramble for perks and patronage and by their excessive sycophancy, the channels got clogged and the system broke down. Mujib was only made aware of the people's distress when trouble broke out somewhere. And then the sycophants quickly denounced it as the work of 'trouble-makers' and 'anti-state elements'. Thus, like the Greek gods of old, they made him mad and destroyed him.

Bangladesh's showing in the first year of independence was aptly summed up when on that anniversary day a 31-gun salute intended to grandly mark the occasion petered out after five rounds and had to be replaced by rifle and automatic fire

#### Notes

1. Reported in The Sunday Times, London, 10.9.1972.
2. The Guardian, London, 1.12.1972.
3. Reported in The Sunday Times, London, 19.3.1972.
4. The Observer, London, 15.10.1972.
5. Bangladesh Today, 1.4.1976.
6. Speech in Dhaka, 26.3.1975.
7. Quoted in Bangladesh Today, London, 1.10.1974.

## IV

# Mujib's Military Nightmare

*I don't want to create a monster like the one we had in Pakistan.*

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

The year 1973 started inauspiciously for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. His first year in office had been one of frenetic effort and gloom relieved only by a single golden success. That was Bangladesh's first Constitution. An imposing document enshrining the noblest values to which an emotional people could aspire, the Constitution had been master-minded by Mujib and piloted by him through the National Assembly. The task was completed on 4 November, 1972, clearly a record for newly-emerged Third World states. After it was handwritten by a master calligraphist, the Constitution was signed and sealed by the middle of December. Bangladesh may have been ruled by a lame-duck administration, but it had a Constitution which any country could be proud of.

Mujib was certainly proud of his handiwork. He had thereafter taken the next logical step on the road to orderly government. Elections had been set for 7 March, 1973. It should have been a happy time for Bangabandhu and Bangladesh, but suddenly on New Year's Day there was unbelievable violence on the streets of Dhaka. Chittagong and Khulna were also shut down by rampaging students. Crowds were stomping the streets of the three main cities hurling abuse on Sheikh Mujib.

It had started as a students' demonstration in Dhaka protesting the US bombing of Hanoi during the bloody days of the Vietnam war. A large crowd gathered outside the US Information Centre and Library in down-town Dhaka. They were agitated but no one anticipated a breach of the peace. It was generally assumed that the students would move on after they had shouted their protest. Suddenly, however, someone provoked them to attack the building, and within minutes the crowd was involved in a fierce battle with police reinforcements who were hastily called in. The police opened fire, killing two students and injuring at least six others.

In the circumstances it was a disaster for Mujib.

There is a special sanctity attached to students in Bangladesh because they have in the past been in the vanguard of the struggle for the people's rights. Mujib was one such student who had risen to leadership on the shoulders of the young men and women who had championed Bengali causes over the years—language, political rights, economic justice and, finally, total emancipation from Pakistan. It was therefore inconceivable that barely a year after the founding of Bangladesh students should be killed in Dhaka by Mujib's police.

The event was doubly significant in that it also marked the first outbreak of mass violence in Dhaka since independence. There had, of course, been a public airing of grievances in the capital four months earlier when Abdur Rab, the left-wing students leader, denounced Mujib for betraying the country.

Mujib had dismissed it as a political stunt. The violence and shooting in the streets now was something more ominous. Mujib's instincts warned him that it was an attempt to undermine his position and he became convinced of a plot when the trouble rapidly spread to Chittagong and Khulna, and left-wing student leaders, in an obvious attempt at a showdown, called for a general strike.

Mujib decided to take up the challenge. He may have been hesitant and unsure of himself in the secretariat, but the streets were home ground to him. Accordingly he took the fight to the students. First he shut the door on criticism by ordering a judicial inquiry and making plain that he would not shirk his responsibility to protect foreign Missions. Then, in a clear reference to the Soviet Union, he ordered his people to crush 'the agents of a foreign power who are trying to push this country into a certain bloc'. The results were stunning. Within hours at least 100,000 villagers armed with sickles and bamboo staves crossed the river to join up with members of the Awami League's student wing in Dhaka. Together they routed the left-wing mobs first from the students' hostels where they were entrenched, and then from the streets of the city. The defeat was so complete that Maulana Bashani, the ageing Chief of the (Marxist) National Awami Party hurriedly called off his own protest meeting and fled to the seclusion of his village.<sup>1</sup>

The left-wing leaders had badly miscalculated in attempting a head-on clash with Mujib. They had not realised that however much the people suffered, there would remain in the Bangladesh peasantry a reservoir of affection for the Bangabandhu. In a delta country subject to floods, cyclones, famine and pestilence people have learned to live with disaster. They take a lot of punishment so long as it does not intrude against their simple values such as ownership of land, the sanctity of the family, Islam their religion, and their pride in being Bengalis. The Pakistanis did not understand this in 1970 and 1971. When the Pakistanis denigrated the piety and the pride of the Bengalis and hunted down their youth, they provoked the heart of Bengali nationalism and were thrown out. In all this Mujib had become the symbol of Bengali hope and pride, albeit in abstract terms, and would remain so for a long time even though his policies were shattering the state. Mujib used this feeling with characteristic agility on this occasion to turn disaster into a resounding victory.

The day's events had two significant results.

First, it drummed into the heads of Mujib's opponents that they could never hope to topple him in a straight fight. Ultimately such an assessment would be fatal for Mujib. Major Rashid, when asked why Mujib was killed and not deposed, replied: 'There was no other way. He had the capacity for mischief and given the chance he would have turned the tables on us.'

The second had happier consequences for Mujib. Having demonstrated his strength by demolishing the opposition, he sailed through the elections three months later to a landslide victory. His Awami League won 307 of the 315 seats in the National Assembly. The other parties could not muster enough strength between them to be formally recognised as the Opposition in the House. There were, of course, allegations made by some defeated candidates that the election had been rigged against them. Professor Muzaffar Ahmad said his faction of the National Awami Party would have won 25 seats but for intimidation, false votes and other malpractices. Apart from one well-recorded incident where one of Mujib's ministers, Mr. Mannan, unaccountably had an upsurge of votes at the close when the count had been going against him all day, these charges were not taken seriously by independent observers in Dhaka.

Maulana Bhashani, an astute political weather vane who had earlier come out against Mujib, after the election quietly fell into line behind the government with the remark that the election result 'was the signal for the arrival of undiluted socialism in Bangladesh'.<sup>2</sup>

Sheikh Mujib understandably took the election result as a personal triumph and a vindication of his policies. 'The result shows that my people love me as I love them', he told reporters. Thus not only were the pressures for reform brushed aside but Mujib and the Awami League also saw their election victory as a licence to press on as they had done in the past. The tempo of the Mad Hatter's dance in Bangladesh picked up perceptibly.

One significant facet of the elections not made public at that time but which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his advisers took careful note of, was the pattern of voting by the troops. The government was disturbed to find that the votes recorded in the military cantonments had gone overwhelmingly against Mujib's Awami League candidates. I had heard a rumour to this effect during a visit to Dhaka in February, 1974, but it was not till December of the following year, after Mujib had been killed, that I was able to pin it down. General Zia and Brigadier M. A. Manzoor told me that a little more than 80% of the troops had voted against the Awami League.

Among the troops was a sizeable proportion of men who had been in the forefront of the independence struggle when Mujib was both flag and father to his people. Now 15 months later they constituted the biggest single bloc against him. The reasons for this disenchantment have been advanced by Majors Farook and Rashid, by Brigadier Manzoor, some other officers and jawans and by Major General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief of Army Staff, himself. In an interview on 11 December, 1975 in Dhaka after Mujib was killed, General Zia told me: 'We were really not an army and did not exist on paper. There was no legal basis for the army. There was no T.O.E. (Table of Organisation and Establishment). Everything was ad hoc. The army was paid because Mujib said it should be paid. Our existence depended on Mujib's word. Our chaps went through hell and they suffered but did not complain because they were involved in serving the country and were willing to make whatever sacrifices that were necessary.'

On the same day Brigadier Manzoor, Zia's Chief of General Staff (CGS), said: 'This is a volunteer's army. The officers and men are all volunteers because they chose the army as a career. What were they given in return? They were ill-fed, ill-equipped and ill-administered. I tell you they had no jerseys, no coats, no boots. They stood on guard duty in the cold at nights in their slippers with blankets wrapped around them. Many of our troops still are in their lungis and without uniform. Then there was the humiliation.' Explaining this Manzoor said: 'Our men were beaten up by the police. The bureaucrats, as they had been in Pakistan, hated the army and they carried over their hatred when they came to Bangladesh. Once some of our boys were killed . . . two jawans (privates) . . . and we went to Mujib and asked that the people who did it should be punished. He promised to look into the matter. Then he informed us that the jawans were killed because they had been collaborators!'

According to Manzoor, Mujib had done his best to destroy the army. He had also adopted the policy of divide and rule, getting rid of anyone who seemed to be a threat to him. 'It was he who divided the army into so many groups', Manzoor said. 'He called them separately, giving one a promotion, another a perk. Things were done without reference to the Chief of Staff'.

General Zia and Manzoor and some other officers I talked to suspected that Sheikh Mujib had been grooming his second son, Jamal, for a senior position

in the army. According to Manzoor, after putting Jamal in the army, Mujib immediately sent him off for training at the Yugoslav Military Academy. Jamal, it seems, couldn't cope with the studies there and to Mujib's great disappointment returned to Dhaka. Thereafter Mujib wanted him sent to Sandhurst. He, in fact, peremptorily telephoned General Shafullah (who was then the Chief of Army Staff) insisting that Jamal be appointed a cadet at Sandhurst. This created a difficult situation all round.

In the first place, cadets for Sandhurst are chosen by an exhaustive selection process and there were many other candidates brighter and more suitable than Jamal. And it was thought that Jamal would not be able to meet the standards required by Britain's premier military academy. Secondly, Sandhurst did not cater for ad hoc appointments. But since Mujib insisted that he be admitted, they agreed to accept Jamal as a special case on payment of a £6000 training fee. This was immediately agreed to and, according to Manzoor, the money was remitted secretly through army channels without the knowledge of the Finance Minister.

Jamal was a likeable lad, and unlike his abrasive older brother, Kamal, was well-behaved and respectful. Not long after returning from Sandhurst—and within a month of his wedding—Jamal was gunned down with the rest of the family when Mujib was assassinated by the Majors.

Mujib had an understandable hatred for all things military. He had suffered grievously at the hands of Pakistan's two military dictators, Field Marshal Ayub Khan and General Yahya Khan. Ayub had arrested Mujib on 7 October, 1958, the day he seized power. During the next 10½ years of Ayub's dictatorship Mujib had been jailed for long periods in solitary confinement. Then in 1968, while once more in detention for political activity, he was made the principal accused in the notorious Agartala Conspiracy trial in Dhaka. The charge: conspiring with India for the secession of East Pakistan. It was a capital offence and Mujib only escaped the gallows because a countryside upsurge against Ayub in 1968 forced him to drop the charges and bring Mujib to the conference table.

While a prisoner of General Yahya Khan in 1971 during the Bangladesh independence struggle, Mujib had had an even closer brush with death. The story he told me was splashed on the front page of The Sunday Times. According to Mujib, he had been tried by a military court and found guilty of treason and sedition. On 15 December, 1971, the day before the Pakistan army surrendered to the Indian troops in Dhaka, General Yahya Khan had ordered Mujib's execution. A military team went from Rawalpindi to Mianwali where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was being held in jail. The team went about its task in a methodical manner. A shallow grave was dug in the cement floor of the room adjoining the Bangladesh leader's cell. He was told that this was being done 'as an air raid precaution'. But Mujib knew what it was for and prepared himself for the worst. Fortunately for him the ceasefire was ordered that night. The jailor, taking pity on Mujib and knowing that Yahya Khan was about to abdicate, smuggled him to his personal quarters where he kept him for two days. The operation was helped by the confusion that attended the surrender of the Pakistan army. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto replaced General Yahya Khan as President, he refused to revalidate the execution order when asked to do so. Two weeks later Mujib was a free man and on his way to Bangladesh via London. He never forgot the jailor who saved his life. In June, 1974, when President Bhutto visited Dhaka, Mujib invited this man along as his personal guest.

Mujib carried his hatred of the army with him to the grave. This attitude



was shared by his ministers and other senior Awami Leaguers who had also escaped death at the hands of the Pakistan army in 1971. To their basic hostility of things military was added, after independence, the fear that the Bangladesh army might try to supplant them. This anxiety was grounded in the fact that the Bengali military men had been in the thick of the fighting during the independence movement while the Awami Leaguers stayed safely in Calcutta out of the line of fire. As such it would have been understandable if the army men with the other freedom fighters had insisted on positions of influence in the new state. The army as an institution at least did not make this demand. It was content to let Mujib rule and in the first two years of independence gave him loyalty and support.

Mujib and his ministers, however, from the very start deliberately emasculated the role of the Defence Forces. Before he was one month in office Mujib took the first step in this direction by signing a 25 year Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance with India. The Indian army had helped to create Bangladesh and it was to India that Mujib now looked to protect it from external aggression. The treaty thus obviated the need for an effective fighting force and the country's defence establishment was reduced to a police-keeping and largely ceremonial role.

Sheikh Mujib himself told me in February, 1974, that he was against a powerful military force. 'I don't want to create another monster like the one we had in Pakistan'.

Mujib wanted the army to wither on the vine—but almost by accident it didn't happen that way.

During the Arab-Israeli war in October, 1973, the Bangladesh government, anxious to make a show of support for the Arab cause, decided to make a gift of a plane-load of the finest domestic tea to Egypt. In the absence of more tangible support with money and arms, the tea was at best a token gesture. But it did have the esoteric virtue of providing the hard-pressed Arab troops with refreshing rounds of the cup that cheers. The government was delighted when Egypt gratefully accepted the offer. Accordingly, a Bangladesh Biman 707 with the fragrant cargo took off from Dhaka on 27 October, and after attempting a landing at Cairo airport, which was closed, was diverted to Benghazi in Libya where it off-loaded the tea.

Coincidentally the discharge of the cargo was watched with considerable interest by two of my colleagues from The Sunday Times who were stranded at Benghazi airport. Tea was the last thing on their minds. What they wanted was a lift to London and they had heard that the plane would soon be headed in that direction. Captain Bill Mackintosh, after checking with Libyan authorities, was happy to oblige.

No one, least of all Sheikh Mujib, could have guessed at that time that the gift would rebound with the most tragic consequences for him and Bangladesh.

As it happened President Anwar Sadat after the war remembered Bangladesh's unusual gesture and decided to make a handsome gesture in return. He knew Bangladesh had no armaments worthy of the name and there were any number of T-54 tanks parked in the desert sands outside Cairo. President Sadat decided to make a gift of thirty of them to Bangladesh. The offer was conveyed to Mujib in the spring of 1974. It dismayed him. He was alarmed at the prospect of having such military equipment in Bangladesh. He did not want tanks. They did not fit in with his ideas about the army. The Foreign Office and his ministers, however, persuaded Mujib that he could on no account refuse Sadat's gift.

The thirty T-54s with 400 rounds of tank ammunition arrived in Bangladesh in July, 1974, making a very welcome addition to the army's strength which was then built around all of three vintage ex-Pakistan army tanks left over from the 1971 war. When they were ceremonially handed over to the 1st Bengal Lancers, Bangladesh's only 'armoured' regiment, one of the officers taking delivery of the tanks was Major Farook Rahman. Though officially second in command of the regiment, he was the most experienced armoured corps officer and the tanks came effectively under his control. Thus man and weapons were brought together—all because of a gift of tea. One year later Farook led the tanks to Mujib's house and changed the course of Bangladesh. But before that Mujib tried to build an alternative to the army.

The Jhatio Rakhi Bahini, which roughly translated means National Security Force, was an elite para-military force whose members had to take oaths of personal loyalty to Mujib. Despite its high-sounding name, it was a sort of a private army of bully boys not far removed from the Nazi Brown Shirts. It was formed originally as an auxiliary force—a group of 8000 hand-picked men from the old Mukhti Bahini to assist the police in the maintenance of law and order. As opposition to Mujib increased, he found it a convenient alternative to the army, which he mistrusted, to be brought in wherever necessary to aid the civil administration. The Rakhi Bahini was raised to 25,000 men who were given basic military training, army-style uniforms, steel helmets and modern automatic weapons. Its officers were mainly political cadres and it was freely used to crush opponents and critics of Mujib and the Awami League. In time it completely terrorised the people.

There are several documented cases of murder and torture committed by the Rakhi Bahini. In May, 1974, after a 17-year-old boy was found to have 'disappeared' after four days of torture, the Supreme Court severely castigated the Rakhi Bahini for 'operating outside the law'. The Court found that Mujib's storm troops had no code of conduct, no rules of procedure and no register of arrests and interrogation. Mujib's answer to the Court's censure was to strip it of its powers to intervene in such cases.

A feature of 1973, the second year of independence, was the expanding violence in Bangladesh. The upsurge of violence was in direct proportion to the increase in corruption, market-manipulation, smuggling and political repression by the cohorts of the Awami League who were savouring their election victory. The people fought back with guns carried over from the liberation war. Gangs of dacoits roamed the countryside at nights, looting granaries and village shops for food and everyday necessities. Mujib countered with the Rakhi Bahini and by liberally arming his party men, many of whom were allowed to carry prohibited bore rifles and automatics. According to Brigadier Manzoor, who was Brigade Commander Jessore at that time, the profusion of arms was caused as much by illegal arms cached after the war as by the Awami Leaguers' free access to the government armouries. He said he was able to recover 33,000 weapons and 3.8 million rounds of ammunition from the six districts under his command. By the end of 1973 the total of politically motivated murders in Bangladesh had crossed the 2000 mark. The victims included some members of Parliament and many of the murders were the result of intra-party conflicts within the Awami League.

Most of the MPs and senior Awami Leaguers had their personal bodyguards. One of them, according to Dhaka journalists, was so insecure that when he went to his village he not only ringed the house with armed followers,

but also stationed others in every room. 'The bloody fellow even has a bodyguard in his bedroom' I was told.

Dhaka, the capital, was not immune to the violence. An unofficial curfew was enforced after midnight when rickshaws, taxis and private cars were checked and searched by the Rakhi Bahini and police. One such incident, which vividly describes the scene in Dhaka in those days, nearly resulted in the death of Mujib's eldest son, Kamal.

Kamal was a hot-headed, very abrasive young man who, like his father, had a proprietary attitude to Bangladesh. Criticism and opposition, in Kamal's book, meant 'anti-national activity' and Kamal was not above using a heavy hand to crush it. Sheikh Mujib perhaps did not like some of the things Kamal did but nevertheless allowed the young man a free hand. A particular target of Kamal's venom was Siraj Shikdar, the leader of the Maoist Sharboharda (proletarian) party, who had fought the Pakistan army during the liberation war in 1971, and had then come out against Mujib. Shikdar and his men used to observe 16 December, the anniversary of Bangladesh's liberation, as a 'Black Day' because they resented what they felt was a gift of independence by India. In 1972 Siraj Shikdar and his men had plastered the capital with anti-Mujib posters and graffiti and had set off bombs in police stations to mark the occasion. This year when intelligence reports indicated they would repeat the performance, Kamal decided to prevent it. On the night of 15 December he and his cronies, armed with sten guns and rifles, went out in a microbus 'hunting' Siraj Shikdar.

They were not aware that the 'Special Branch' of the Dhaka police, under Superintendent Mahboob, had received similar orders from their Chief. Their paths crossed during the course of the hunt. The police squad under Sergeant Kibria in an unmarked Toyota car noticed the armed group in the microbus and decided to follow it. Kibria thought he had come upon the Shikdar gang. Kamal, in the microbus, for his part thought Shikdar's men were in the Toyota.

The showdown came opposite the Bangladesh Bank headquarters in the Motijheel area of the city. In the exchange of fire Kamal was hit in the neck, the bullet narrowly missing his wind-pipe and jugular vein. With blood spurting from his wound he jumped from the microbus shouting 'Don't shoot. I'm Kamal. I'm Kamal.' When they realised their mistake, some of the policemen rushed him to the Postgraduate Medical College Hospital. The panic-stricken Sergeant Kibria meanwhile fled to the bungalow of the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka, Mr. Abdul Hayat, where he told him 'we have made a terrible blunder and brought heaven down upon our heads'.

Hayat was an experienced officer and realised that heads would roll because of this blunder. After making sure that Kamal was still alive, he lost no time driving to Bangababan for an immediate audience with Bangabandhu 'on a matter of the greatest importance'. Mujib's reaction on hearing the new surprised the Deputy Commissioner. 'Let him die', he said, clearly furious that Kamal had once again taken the law into his own hands. When Abdul Hayat asked what he should do about the policemen, Mujib told him to return them to duty. 'They have nothing to fear' he said. It is a matter of record that on that occasion at least Mujib kept his word.

My friend Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack') who recounted this story saying he had got it firsthand from the Deputy Commissioner, told me Mujib refused to visit his son in hospital for two days. When on the day after the incident 'Zack' called at the hospital, Begum Mujib was very distressed and told him in Bengali: 'Bhai, he has come to have such a big head that he doesn't come to

visit his own son who is dying'. The fact is that Mujib was becoming increasingly embarrassed by Kamal's behaviour. I know of several occasions when he remonstrated with him about his free-wheeling ways. Then paradoxically he also indulged Kamal and sent him on political errands or to work among the various student groups. As such Kamal was never far from the throne. On this occasion, father and son were soon reconciled. When Kamal left hospital and had fully recovered he was temporarily taken out of political work and given the task of organising a series of football tournaments. It was hoped that this would keep him out of mischief while at the same time giving the people something to take their minds off their problems.

Among the angry young men in the Bangladesh army were two young Majors who took immense pride in their professional competence and who now found their careers on the rocks because of Sheikh Mujib's studied neglect of the armed forces. One was Farook Rahman, second in command of the 1st Bengal Lancers, the country's only tank regiment which till the middle of 1974 had only three obsolete tanks in its armoury. The other was Khandaker Abdur Rashid, the Commanding Officer of the 2 Field Artillery, also based on Dhaka.

Farook and Rashid, both born within a month of each other in 1946, were good friends and brothers-in-law since they had married the daughters of Mr. S. H. Khan who belonged to Chittagong's leading industrial family. (Mr Khan's older brother was A. K. Khan, a former Industries Minister in the Pakistan government). A single wall separated their bungalows in Dhaka cantonment and in the evenings the sisters and their husbands would often get together, as they put it, 'to pass the time'. It was these family ties that allowed them to confide in each other about their disenchantment with the way things were going in Bangladesh. The two Majors were otherwise poles apart in terms of personality and came from very different backgrounds.

Farook -his full name is Dowan Esheratullah Syed Farook Rahman—comes from the upper crust of Bengali society and claimed that on commissioning he was the first second-generation Bengali officer in the Pakistan army. His father's family are known as the 'Pirs' (religious leaders) of Rajshahi, claiming direct descent from Arab Syeds who had settled on a modest estate in Nauga. His mother belongs to a land-owning zamindar family of the Jamalpur/Islampur area of Mymensingh who claim descent from Turkish soldiers of fortune under the Moghul emperors. Between them Farook was closely related to Dr. A. R. Mullick (former Finance Minister and University Vice Chancellor), Syed Nazrul Islam (Acting President of Bangladesh while Mujib was in jail), Syed Aatur Rahman Khan (former Chief Minister of East Pakistan and Prime Minister of Bangladesh) and Major General Khalid Musharraf who was very briefly Chief of Staff of the Bangladesh army in November 1975, before being killed in the sepoy mutiny.

Farook's father, Major Syed Aatur Rahman, was an Army doctor and Farook's education reflects the pattern of his postings. He criss-crossed the sub-continent six times in thirteen years starting off in the Fatima Jinnah girls school, Comilla (Farook jokes about his 'one and only time in a convent'). He went to Abbottabad (Burnhall), Dhaka (St. Joseph's), Quetta (St. Francis' Grammar School), Rawalpindi (Station Road school where Field Marshall Ayub Khan's daughter Naseem was also a student), Dhaka (Adamjee College), ending up in a college in Kohat for a crash course in maths.

Farook was the eldest of the three children—he has two sisters—and it was not intended that he should go into the army. His love of flying got him a solo



licence at the age of 17 and he had unsuccessfully tried to join the Pakistan Air Force. So the family got him admitted to Bristol University for a course in aeronautical engineering and he would have gone to the UK in 1966 but for the intervention of hostilities with India in the spring of 1965 over the Rann of Kutch.

Caught up in the prevailing patriotic fervour Farook, on his way to college, stopped off at the Inter-services Selection Board office in Kohat and volunteered for a commission. A week later when the call came there was initial disapproval from his mother who didn't want to lose her only son to the army. But Farook, with his father's consent, finally made it to the Pakistan Military Academy at Risalpur where he quickly distinguished himself by becoming battalion sergeant major. When he graduated fourth of three hundred officer cadets, he was given his choice of service. Farook chose the armoured corps. 'I don't want to do foot-slogging in the army' he said politely turning down suggestions by Majors Ziaur Rahman and Khalid Musharraf, then instructors in the P.M.A., that he should join the Bengal Regiment. Instead, Farook was appointed to the 13th Lancers.

Later Farook transferred to the 31st Cavalry, then based at Sialkot, and in 1970 at the age of 24, he found himself a captain, acting squadron commander, of 'Charlie Squadron' and 'in the command chain of the armoured corps'. This significant career opening was made possible by his success in the tactical armour course which he topped with B+.

In October, 1970, Captain Farook Rahman received a note from his CO informing him that he had been selected for secondment to the oil-rich Sheikdom of Abu Dhabi where Pakistan was involved in training and servicing the Sultan's armed forces. Farook has no idea why he was chosen for secondment, but the fact remains that at the beginning of 1971 when the political upsurge was getting under way in East Bengal, Farook found himself a squadron commander in the Abu Dhabi armoured regiment based near the oil port of Jabal Dhana.

It was a happy time for the young tank commander. Military duties, in which he exulted, took up only a portion of his time. He had lots of it left for his other loves—reading volumes of military history and tactics, driving fast cars, and music. Farook bought himself the best stereo system he could find and an Opel Commodore GS in which he would tear along the desert roads at 100 mph. He was billeted in the British Officers mess and it was there that in the middle of June, 1971, he found a bundle of British newspapers, among them the Sunday Times featuring my massive exposé of the Pakistan army's campaign of genocide in Bangladesh. It marked the turning point in his life.

As Farook put it, 'What actually convinced me about your writing was your technique and reporting.' 'The way you wrote about those Pakistani officers straightaway struck me that this man is not a fraud. Only a chap who has been in close touch with the Pakistan army knows exactly how they behave. I know. And I also know that no one can simulate it. That's why I was solidly convinced that this chap knew exactly what he was writing and couldn't be wrong. This forced me to decide to go'.

I asked Farook 'Would you have gone if you had not read the article?'

He answered: 'As I said, I was not interested in politics because I was rising very fast professionally with the little service that I had. I was only interested in seeing how fast I could go. I was only interested professionally in being a general officer. Then suddenly this thing came to me and disrupted my whole damn career'.

Confirmation of the disaster that had staggered the Bengalis came in a letter

from his uncle, Nurul Quader, a Bengali civilian officer who had fled to Calcutta to join the Mujibnagar government. Farook is an ardent nationalist. He is also single-minded, with decisiveness grounded on careful planning. After carefully weighing the situation, Farook decided he could no longer serve in the Pakistan army.

On 12 November, 1971, he packed a bag and drove to Dubai airport where he abandoned his car. Then he caught the first flight to Beirut and London for the long journey to Bangladesh.

Farook saw Farida for the first time when picnicking with Major Rashid and his wife, Tinku, on the Kaptai Lake near Chittagong. Farook was instantly smitten by the younger sister's beauty, refinement and quiet charm. 'I want to marry her' he told Rashid in the matter-of-fact manner they converse with each other. 'You must arrange it'. Rashid did the needful. Farook and Farida were married on 12 August 1972. After the marriage Farook and Rashid became inseparable.

The Majors first met in the Pakistan Military Academy at Risalpur. Farook belonged to a senior batch, but it did not matter. The Bengali officer cadets, who were heavily outnumbered in the Academy by Punjabis and Pathans, sat together in the cafeteria 'to chit-chat' as Rashid tells it. Rashid was very talkative; Farook a good listener.

Like Farook, Khandaker Abdur Rashid's own presence in the military academy was the result of the effusion of patriotism during the Pakistan-India war in 1965. Rashid came from the tiny village of Chaypharia on the road between Comilla and Daudkhanda where his father was a primary school teacher of modest means. He is not connected to the great or the learned, and is the first to deny Bangladesh gossip that he is a nephew of Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the Awami League minister the two majors installed as President after knocking off Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Rashid insists that the only connection with Khandaker Moshtaque is an accident of geography. They come from the same sub-district.

Rashid was studying soil science, geography and geology at Dhaka University when the war broke out in 1965, and he thought it was a patriotic duty to seek a commission in the Pakistan army. He was selected and after a run-of-the-mill showing in the PMA, graduated 92nd in his class. Rashid requested posting to the Bengal Regiment but instead was given his second choice and commissioned in the 2 Field Artillery then based in Bannu in the North-west Frontier Province.

In 1968 when promoted to captain, Rashid went to Dhaka on a short holiday and lived with an uncle. He was an eligible bachelor and his uncle's friend had a very eligible niece, Zobeida ('Tinku') the elder daughter of S. H. Khan of the Chittagong industrial family. The match was arranged and Rashid took his bride back with him to Bannu where the first of their two daughters was born.

For a brief period in 1970 he was posted to the East Pakistan Rifles and stationed at Khulna where he was employed in policing the border with India. One day he caught an NCO with Rs 100,000 in his pocket. The man had evidently obtained a big bribe from the smugglers operating in the area. Rashid promptly arrested him. His action was not appreciated by his commanding officer. Rashid says this man, a Punjabi, 'was also involved in making money from the smugglers'. Later when he caught some gold smugglers red-handed, Rashid suddenly found himself back to his Artillery unit. The excuse, he was to learn later, was a secret report by his CO that he had 'developed parochial tendencies'. In the military jargon of that time this meant that he was a Bengali nationalist. It was a bad certificate for any Pakistani army officer.

When the Pakistan army cracked down on the Bengalis in March 1971, Rashid's unit was stationed in Hajira on the Pakistan side of the ceasefire line in Kashmir. It was a trying period for the young Bengali officer. The radio reports he was picking up from different parts of the world gave horrifying stories of the trauma in East Pakistan. Rashid decided to defect from the Pakistan army.

Explaining his reasoning he said: 'I thought that once the movement had started, whatever the cause may be, and right or wrong, it had to be seen through to the end. If we failed to liberate our country then we would have been tremendously subjugated by the Pakistanis. They would never have treated us like human beings again. We therefore had no choice. It became a duty of every Bengali to fight for his country's liberation so that we could live independently with honour and respect'.

Like millions of other Bengali women at that time, Tinku rallied bravely behind her husband. 'The country comes first', Rashid recalls her saying 'other things are not important. We must go'. To break out of their isolation in Hajira, Rashid applied for a 10-day furlough on the excuse that his parents were ill and he had to see them. After an agony of waiting his request was granted and on 2 October, 1971, he took Tinku and their baby daughter to Dhaka. Rashid sent his wife and child to her parents in Chittagong and himself tried to cross the border into India at Agartala. Twice he was nearly caught in the cross-fire. The third time, on 29 October, he slipped through.

He re-entered East Pakistan through Sylhet at the beginning of December with a Mukhti Bahini howitzer battery attached to Ziaur Rahman's 'Z' Force. After independence this battery was raised to a regiment, the 2 Field Artillery, and Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid became its Commanding Officer.

Farook and Rashid, like the other Bengali officers and men involved in the liberation movement—the Bangladesh army itself—had high hopes for Bangladesh after its creation. They were proud of their country, extremely nationalist and the fact that they were willing to take a back seat in the first years of independence clearly shows that they had no political ambitions. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, however, did not see it that way. His bitter experiences in Pakistani jails made him suspicious and hostile to all things military. In his anxiety not to re-create the 'monster' he had known in Pakistan he ended up doing that very thing—and it destroyed him.

#### Notes

1. Abu Moosa in The Sunday Times, London, 7 I. 1973.
2. The Guardian, London, 9.9 1973.

## V

# A Summer of Tigers

*There was crisis everywhere.*

—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

The summer and autumn of 1974 to many people in Bangladesh were the worst in living memory. The orgy of killing by the Pakistani army in 1971 had been traumatic; but in retrospect it was accepted as the price of independence, and in the darkest days of the freedom struggle the hope of a new life burned fiercely in the hearts of the Bengalis. Now in the third year of independence hope was extinguished.

The food supply had progressively deteriorated due to smuggling, market manipulation and corruption at all stages of the import and distribution network. Rice prices were soaring beyond the 300 Takka crisis mark. Then the floods came, engulfing 21,000 square miles or two-fifths of the total land area of the delta country during July, August and part of September. Famine and crisis stalked the land like the big jungle cats. People in the countryside began to die like flies.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself publicly admitted later that 27,000 people died of starvation. In the circumstances this was a very conservative estimate. Bodies take a long time to get run down, and for every human being who ultimately falls victim to starvation, many others are killed off by diseases arising from malnutrition and low resistance. Since at least 3,000,000 people were living below the starvation line, by that reckoning the death toll as a result of the famine was well into six figures.

Indeed confirmation of this assessment came from the Prime Minister himself. Before emplaning for New York to address the General Assembly after Bangladesh had been admitted to the United Nations, Mujib ordered his ministers to open gruel kitchens in all the 4300 'unions' (i.e. groups of villages) in the country. Ultimately 5700 gruel kitchens were opened to give three to four million people a meagre life-sustaining meal each day.<sup>1</sup>

Millions of people in the countryside surged to the towns in search of food. Thousands of them gravitated to Dhaka, the capital, in the hope that Bangabandhu would give them something to eat. But the Prime Minister was hard-put to maintain even the weekly ration for the population which was multiplying at the rate of three million a year. It was calculated that the Bangladesh population of 75 million would double itself in 26 years.

The influx of people to the city brought new tensions to Dhaka where the government was embarrassed by the large swarms of beggars and destitutes everywhere. On 3 January, 1975, a massive cosmetic operation was launched forcing 200,000 destitutes and slum dwellers either to return to their villages or to be moved to three 'camps' that had been hastily laid out several miles from the city. The worst of these was at Demra, 14 miles from Dhaka, which the Guardian (dated 18.2.1975) described as 'Mujib's man-made disaster area'. Conditions in the camp were appalling.

More than 50,000 people were crowded into the camp which was ringed

with barbed wire and guarded by the Rakhi Bahini. The authorities had provided a few latrines and water pumps. Each family was also given a 19' x 9' plot of land for a hut but no building materials. There were also no medical supplies, no means of income for the people and only a meagre food ration. The four-bed 'hospital' was used as a dormitory for the camp officials. An old man told visiting journalists, 'Either give us food or shoot us'. According to Grace Samson, a Dutch Salvation Army volunteer, the tragedy was 'not an act of God, but an act of government; a man-made disaster'. It is not known how many perished in these camps. But it marked another turning point, for the people now not only cursed the government but also Sheikh Mujib himself.

He had till then generally managed to escape the public odium for the mess in Bangladesh. People blamed Mujib's ministers and the officials around him, rather than him personally. This may have been for emotional reasons because many still had lingering hope that Bangabandhu would ultimately live up to public expectation. Mujib for his part did not miss any opportunity to blunt criticism by diverting it on to his ministers.

M. R. Akhtar ('Mukul'), who was close to Mujib, tells an interesting story of how on one occasion this was done. According to him, at the beginning of March, 1975, Sheikh Mujib was secretly in touch with some leaders of the opposition Jashod party who were supposed to be underground at that time. The Jashod, which rightly or wrongly had the reputation of being a pro-Indian party, wanted to refurbish its image with a big demonstration against the government, including an assault on Bangababan. According to Mukul, Mujib persuaded them to march instead on the house of the Home Minister, Mansoor Ali. A deal was done. So on 17 March after a big protest meeting at the Paltan Maidan the mob was led to Mansoor Ali's house, which it savaged. The minister, rather conveniently, had gone out of town with his family for a few days. The affair ended when the Rakhi Bahini opened fire on the mob killing eleven people. Thus according to Mukul, the Jashod's image improved without any real damage to Mujib's. Mujib had another cause for celebration that day. It was his 53rd birthday.

The violence continued to mount. Mujib himself at the end of 1974 claimed that almost 4000 Awami League party workers, including five Members of Parliament, had been killed 'under cover of darkness' by opposition groups. Brigadier Manzoor said that much of this killing was the result of intra-party squabbles. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, who succeeded Mujib as President, told me that sometimes in his house in the old quarter of Dhaka the nights were made hideous by the wailing of women whose husbands and sons had been dragged away by the Rakhi Bahini on Home Minister Mansoor Ali's orders. Moshtaque claims these unfortunate people 'just vanished'.

Sheikh Mujib's reaction to the mounting crises caused by mismanagement and corruption was to launch a series of cosmetic operations. To him it was inconceivable that he had failed the people. He dismissed nine ministers blaming them for the mess. He prosecuted some minor officials and party men and in a grand gesture ordered the army to clean up the smugglers and hoarders. This last act was one of a series of colossal blunders that year which hastened his end.

Till then the soldiers, isolated in their barracks, had been only distant observers of the fading Bangladesh dream. Now they were brought face to face with all the gruesome details of the terrible rot afflicting the country. They did not like it. Inevitably some of them began to think it was a patriotic duty to

save Bangladesh from the waywardness of the politicians. Thus the army was drawn into politics and it destroyed Mujib.

When dramatic gestures failed to stem the rot, Mujib persuaded himself that it was not his policies that were wrong but the system of government. Apparently the parliamentary system with a Cabinet of ministers collectively responsible to the National Assembly hampered his style. He began to complain that the parliamentary system was not suited to the requirements of Bangladesh. There was a curious redundancy in Mujib's desire for more power. His towering position as Bangabandhu, and the tight grip he had on all but eight seats in the National Assembly since the elections in the previous year had reduced Parliament to the position of a rubber stamp. No one dared deny him anything; yet Mujib hungered for more power. He decided to switch to a presidential system loosely devised on the French/American pattern. He did this in an outrageous manner.

First on 28th December 1974, he proclaimed a 'State of Emergency,' suspending fundamental rights and completely stripping the courts of their power to intervene in any of his actions. Then he rammed through the Assembly a series of far-reaching amendments to the Constitution which reduced the National Parliament to an advisory status and 'legitimised' his own grip on absolute power.

In less than a month the National Assembly rubber-stamped the changes, 294 members voting in favour and none against. The captive press chorused its approval. The sycophants cheered. Sheikh Mujib described this action as the 'Second Revolution' aimed at 'emancipating the toiling people from exploitation and injustice'.<sup>2</sup> He was sworn in as President on 25 January, 1975. In the short span of three years the great parliamentarian had become the great dictator!

The farcical nature of the 'Second Revolution' was exposed by the composition of his new Cabinet. There were the same docile faces, operating in the old servile manner. Syed Nazrul Islam, who moved up to Vice President, was put in charge of the Ministry of Planning. Mansoor Ali, designated Prime Minister, continued in the Ministry of Home Affairs with a string of other portfolios. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed became Commerce Minister. The government, as a whole, continued its rapid journey downhill. Apparently all that had happened was that the Mad Hatter's dance had briefly halted for a game of musical chairs and Mujib, the puppet master, had got himself a new whip. Otherwise nothing had changed. But Mujib had irrevocably harmed himself. By concentrating all state authority in himself he had also concentrated public criticism and hostility against his own person. No longer could he pass the blame on to his ministers, officials and party men. This was a curious blunder for so astute a politician.

Towards the end of January, 1974, some young army officers were involved in an incident which would have a direct bearing on Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination. The occasion was a wedding reception in the Ladies Club, Dhaka. Among the guests were Major Sharful Huq 'Dalim' and his attractive wife. She is the daughter of Mr. and Begum R. I. Chowdhury. The Chowdhurys were close friends of Sheikh Mujib and his family. Begum Chowdhury, a senior member of the Awami League, had accompanied Begum Mujibur Rahman when she came to London for medical attention in 1973. R. I. Chowdhury, who was First Secretary (Consular) in the London High Commission, had also been favoured by Mujib with more than the normal extensions of service after reaching retirement age. Thus Dalim and his wife were considered part

of the 'in' set, but perhaps not so well in with Mujib as the brother of another guest at that wedding, Ghazi Gholam Mustafa. Apart from holding a very lucrative position as Chairman of the Bangladesh Red Cross, Ghazi was also the Awami League's hard hitting city boss in Dhaka. In the later capacity he was Mujib's right-hand man, very tough, powerful and free-wheeling.

According to those present that day, during the party Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's brother made some insulting remarks about Mrs. Dalim. In the altercation that followed, Ghazi's bully-boys are said to have joined in and roughed up the army couple. Some say the thugs attempted to kidnap them, but there is no confirmation of this. In any case Dalim's army colleagues decided to take immediate action. Accompanied by their troops they piled into two trucks, went hunting for the offending gang and ended up wrecking Ghazi Gholam Mustafa's bungalow.

Both parties appealed to Sheikh Mujib for redress, and he managed to temporarily soothe their ruffled tempers. Later, after another incident of 'indiscipline' was reported from Comilla cantonment, Mujib instituted a military inquiry into the young officers' misconduct. As a result 22 young officers were dismissed or prematurely retired from service. Among them were Majors Dalim, Noor and Huda. As a gesture to the family Mujib tried to make it up to Dalim by assisting him in setting up a business venture. The hurt, however, rankled. A year later the three ex-army officers would figure prominently in Mujib's assassination. Meanwhile the Dalim incident caused widespread resentment among the younger officers. They felt betrayed not only by Sheikh Mujib but also by their seniors in the army. Many of them began to carry side arms for personal protection whenever they went out with their families and they talked openly about their dissatisfaction. Military messes became centres of plotting. The intelligence services kept close tabs on all this and when their reports reached Mujib he made no secret of his intention to supplant the army with the Rakhi Bahini. The more he moved in that direction, the more he alienated the army.

But at that time the immediate threat to Mujib's life was not from the army but from a totally unexpected quarter.

It so happened that Siraj Shikdar, leader of the Maoist Sharboharda (proletarian) party and the man Mujib's son Kamal had once tried to hunt down, was finally caught by the police near Chittagong towards the end of December, 1974. According to his brother-in-law, Zackaria Chowdhury ('Zack'), Siraj Shikdar was escorted to Dhaka and taken to Gonobaban to meet Sheikh Mujib. Mujib tried to win him over. When Shikdar refused to compromise Mujib ordered the police to 'deal' with him.

Zack said Siraj was driven handcuffed and blindfolded to the police control room on the disused Dhaka racecourse and then taken out at night on a lonely road and shot. The official explanation given at that time was that Siraj Shikdar was shot dead 'while trying to escape'. His sister, Shamim, who is Zack's wife, however, maintains that the bullet wounds on Siraj's body clearly showed he had been shot from the front six times in the chest, probably with a sten gun.

Whatever the reason, it was openly talked about in Dhaka that Siraj Shikdar had been liquidated on Mujib's instructions. Shamim herself was convinced that her brother had died by Mujib's hand. So this 19-year old girl decided to take revenge. 'I got a revolver from the (Sharboharda) party and looked for an opportunity to kill this murderer' she told me. Shamim was banking on the fact that, as she was one of Bangladesh's best known sculptresses who had won the President's award for achievement the year before, she could get close enough to Mujib to shoot him.

She made several requests for an appointment with Mujib. Each time she was put off. Then she invited him to an exhibition at the Dhaka University's school of art. Mujib accepted the invitation but failed to turn up. 'I was getting desperate' she recalls. 'However much I tried I just couldn't get within shooting distance of him'. She never did. Fate intervened to save Mujib. Shamim fell in love, got married to Zack and left the country with her husband.

Bravo Squadron of the First Bengal Lancers under the command of Major Farook Rahman in July 1974 moved from its base in Dhaka to Demra, just south of the capital. The move was part of a dramatic 'Operation Clean-up' ordered by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in a grand gesture of public appeasement. Farook's command at first extended to the whole of the Narayanganj industrial complex. Later he was moved further south to Munshiganj. He took up his new assignment in an ebullient mood. 'Ah, very good' he told his troops, 'the Prime Minister has at last found out what his chaps have been doing and since he wants the army to fix them, let's do a good job.'

Farook went about his task in characteristic no-nonsense manner. Within days he had cleared up a particularly black spot near the roundabout on the Narayanganj Road which was infested with dacoits. The leading bandit in the area was a 20-year old man professing to be an Awami Leaguer. After being arrested by Farook he freely confessed to having killed 21 people. 'I asked him why he had done it' Farook told me later, 'and the bloody fellow answered "I did it on my ustad's (chief) orders"'. The 'ustad' was Mujib. What the hell was I supposed to do?' The incident gravely disturbed the young officer. He was even more upset by the increasing political interference whenever action was taken against Awami Leaguers.

Elsewhere other army officers were having similar experiences in the course of their police-keeping operation. Hundreds of people were arrested by them for smuggling, hoarding and intimidation and murder. Invariably, after a telephone call from Dhaka to the local police, charges were quietly dropped against the most prominent of these men and they were allowed to go free. 'It was a damned awkward situation' Farook recalled. 'Every time we caught a chap he turned out to be either an Awami Leaguer or a very staunch Awami League supporter. They were getting protection from the top and we were getting a shelling for doing our job.'

Farook said he received a general order in writing informing him that should he arrest anyone he would be acting on his own responsibility and that his regimental commanding officer and the brigade commander would not be answerable if anything went wrong. 'None of the senior commanders would accept responsibility because the Prime Minister had said "If you take any funny action you will be hanged for it"'. Farook said. 'It meant that we were supposed to root out corruption and malpractices, but we were supposed to stop short of the Awami League. The whole thing was a damn farce.'

At the same time Farook and the officers were being told to have no mercy on the opposition, particularly Naxalites (Maoists) and other leftists who got caught in the army's net. 'I was given orders to beat them up, get information from them and then throw them in the river' Farook told me. 'Colonel Shafat Jamil (then Brigade Commander Dhaka) said they were vermin and must be destroyed'. Farook said Shafat Jamil was reflecting orders from the top. 'As far as Sheikh Mujib was concerned' he said 'the indirect orders to us were for leftists like Siraj Shikdar and Col. Ziauddin and such groups, if we catch them to kill them.' Farook refused to comply with these orders. 'I was not deeply interested in Marxists,' he said 'but what impressed me was that these chaps

did care for the country. They may have gone the wrong way ideologically but they had not so far done wrong to the country.' So whenever he caught one of these men Farook quietly let him go.

One day during a combing operation in the Tongi area north of Dhaka, Major Nasser who was commanding another squadron of the Bengal Lancers, arrested three small-time thugs. In the course of interrogation one of the men broke down and told the army officers a story about a particularly gruesome triple murder which had rocked Tongi the previous winter. It transpired that a newly married couple travelling to their home in a taxi had been waylaid on the outskirts of the town. The bridegroom and the taxi driver were hacked to death and their bodies thrown in the river. The bride, who was carried off to an isolated cottage, was repeatedly raped by her abductors. Three days later her mutilated body was found on the road near a bridge.

Confessing to his part in the crime, the thug told the army men the police investigation was called off when they found that the ring-leader of the gang was his boss, Muzamil, chairman of the Tongi Awami League. According to Farook the confession so infuriated the interrogating officer, a boyish lieutenant named Ishtiaq who has since resigned and left the country, that 'he started kicking the chap so hard that he died of internal injuries.'

Muzamil himself was taken by Major Nasser to Dhaka for prosecution after he had confirmed from police records that the thug had been telling the truth. According to Farook, Muzamil offered Nasser 300,000 Takkas for his release. 'Don't make it a public affair,' the Awami Leaguer advised him. 'You will anyway have to let me go, either today or tomorrow. So why not take the money and forget about it?' Nasser, who was affronted by this blatant attempt to bribe him, swore he would bring Muzamil to trial and make him hang for his crime. He handed him over to the civil authorities. Farook said they were all astonished a few days later to find that Muzamil had been released on Sheikh Mujib's direct intervention. 'I told you to take the money,' Muzamil crowed. 'You would have been the gainers. Now I have been released anyway and you get nothing.'

The incident shattered Farook and his colleagues. Tongi marked the turning point for them. 'It seemed as if we were living in a society headed by a criminal organisation. It was as if the Mafia had taken over Bangladesh. We were totally disillusioned. Here was the head of government abetting murder and other extreme things from which he was supposed to protect us. This was not acceptable. We decided he must go.'

Major Farook wanted to kill Sheikh Mujib that very day. He recalled: 'I lost my temper. I told Capt. Sharful Hussain "Sharful Hussain. This is absolutely useless. Let's go and knock off this chap." He said "Yes Sir. But think about it a bit more." I said, "All right, I'll think about it."'

'That's all I could do, think about Sheikh Mujib and how to kill him. I had my troops with me, the solid hard core who I had myself trained in detail, how to handle weapons, how to shoot, how to ambush, to surprise. Mujib was being guarded by our troops (Lancers) at that time. I thought I should just drive the trucks in and tell the guards, Okay. Relax. Then go inside and shoot him up.'

'Then I realised that that was a very stupid thing. I was not thinking. I was working on emotion. I had not developed that far. That's why I trusted my troops so much. They knew my feelings. They did not betray me.'

Explaining his metamorphosis, Farook continued: 'Do you remember how we wept when we heard that Sheikh Mujib had returned? Remember the whole country, people mad all over! The man was almost made a god! In 1972 if he

told us, "Alright you all round up the Awami Leaguers or the Brigade Commanders, tie them up and throw them in the river' we would have done it. Why? Because Sheikh Mujib had said it. What for? Nobody would have asked. I would not have asked. We felt we have got a country, we have got a leader. We were prepared to do anything. We did not mind any problem. Soldiers, men, rank, nothing mattered. It was such an extreme emotion and it was not just one person, but hundreds of thousands of people. All differences had died. That's why it turned so bitter. I say this chap (Mujib) has created the crime of the century by destroying the feeling of such a large number of people.'

Farook said the Tongi incident made him a rebel. 'After that I was just not interested in promotion, courses, career or anything. I only thought about one thing—how this government should go.'

In Bangladesh at that time there were many others with the same fixation. There was a lot of quiet plotting going on all over, including those such as Mujib's political advisers and ministers who daily fawned at his feet. Politicians used to meet with exaggerated casualness at weddings, funerals and at the mosques after 'namaz' (prayer) on Friday. They were extremely careful in their intrigue. Talk could be dangerous since sycophants among them had the habit of running off to denounce each other. And there were swarms of Mujib's intelligence men. But there was less restraint in the army. The Dalim incident followed by the retirement/dismissal of 22 young officers had not only created resentment against Mujib but had also thoroughly exposed the ineffectiveness of the senior army commanders. Thus with their careers in a mess and no one in the army to stand up to the politicians, the young officers and men could not have cared less about who heard them sounding off.

Farook recalls: 'Everyone was fed up. They were all talking about ideologies, coups, counter-coups, Marxism, communism, and the formation of cells. Everywhere there was talk about plots and counter-plots.' Mujib's intelligence services faithfully monitored everything. But the Bangabandhu, supremely confident of his ability to deal with the youngsters, dismissed it all as bravado. His main concern was how the commanders behaved and he had tamed them.

During this period Farook missed his brother-in-law and confidant, Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid, who had gone to India earlier on a 14-month gunnery staff course at Deolali near Bombay. He began to discuss politics with his troops, carefully sounding out their own ideas and, where necessary, motivating them with his own. In Rashid's absence Farook also talked to other officers, individually and in small groups. There were several young majors, a colonel from army headquarters and an air force officer who used to get together. Farook identified them as Col. Amin Ahmed, GI-OPs in army headquarters, Major Hafiz (Brigade Major, 46 Dhaka Brigade), Major Salim of the Artillery, Major Nasir, Major Ghaffar and Sq. Leader Liaquat. They met occasionally and not all were present on every occasion. 'We used to meet by pre-arrangement at somebody's house at odd times' he said 'but I soon found these chaps had long-term thinking and I wanted to act quickly'. The secret meetings, however, were productive in that they compelled Farook to undertake a self-taught, crash course in politics. His strictly army background had left him sorely lacking in this department. 'We were thinking in national terms and suddenly I felt I had to read a lot because I found that I was blank'.

In the autumn of 1974 Farook read several dozen books, among them Che Guevara's Diaries, some writings of Chairman Mao and a thesis on the political problems of South-East Asia. He was not impressed by the Marxist patterns. 'The only conclusion I came to was that they had their own problems and had

tackled them in their own way. But this was not a solution for Bangladesh. There was nothing I could find in any textbook or anywhere which fitted our situation'.

During the course of these researches Farook read about the Indonesian experiment and the overthrow of Sukarno whose political experiences bore some resemblance to Mujib's. It led him to a crucial decision.

He recalls: 'I asked myself should Sheikh Mujib be deposed like Sukarno and retired to a palace? I debated the idea for a long time. If we had the whole army or the whole population behind us things would have been different. But there were very few of us. If we took him prisoner, counter-forces would come out in his name and over-run us. I also knew he was depending strongly on India. There was always the possibility that someone would call in the Indians on behalf of Sheikh Mujib or that the Indians would object to Mujib being deposed and send in their armies to support him. Even if he were killed at that stage it would have made no difference because by then Bangladesh would have come under India. This would have defeated my whole purpose. Bangladesh would have been in a bigger soup'.

Farook continued: 'I realised that if he was killed nothing would happen in the country, at least there would be no cause for India to wave the flag and come in. In a way Sheikh Mujib signed his own death warrant because of his love affair with India. We could not put him away like Sukarno. I was convinced there was no alternative. Sheikh Mujib had to die'.

Major Rashid concurred with this assessment. 'Mujib had to die,' Rashid said, 'because he was more experienced politically and if he lived we would not have been able to control the situation. He would have brought in outside powers, even if it meant a civil war. And he would have turned the tables on us'.

In December 1974 Major Farook Rahman told his fellow plotters of a plan to kill Sheikh Mujib. It was the Prime Minister's habit to travel by one of the Bangladesh Air Force's Russian-built helicopters whenever he went any distance out of Dhaka. Not only did it save time, but for security reasons his family and personal staff thought helicopter travel an ideal arrangement. Farook proposed to knock off Mujib in the air when he was most vulnerable.

One of the plotters was Sq. Leader Liaquat who was flight control officer at Dhaka. Farook suggested that Liaquat arrange to fly Mujib the next time he went out and to take along with him an automatic pistol. At the point of the radio cross-over from Dhaka control to the next control zone, when radio contact with the ground would normally be suspended for a brief period, Liaquat was to switch off the radio, shoot Mujib and toss his body into a convenient river. He was then to proceed to his destination as though nothing had happened. Meanwhile Farook and the others would 'take necessary action on the ground'.

Farook is an amateur pilot and he thought the plot had much to recommend itself. It would have been the easiest thing to kill Mujib when he was isolated from his bodyguards. The Prime Minister's travel plans were however unpredictable. The plot, like several other schemes discussed by the group, was never tried out.

As the days passed Farook began to get restive. The young officers were having endless discussions about ideological matters and planned to establish cells throughout the army. In practical terms, however, they were getting nowhere. Coup by conversation did not appeal to the practical armoured corps officer particularly as Sheikh Mujib was showing signs of strengthening his own position. Mujib's promulgation of the State of Emergency was yet to come.

But meanwhile Dhaka was humming with rumours about his plans to change the Constitution and instal himself as President with absolute power, presiding over a one-party state. Without telling the others, Farook quietly began to work on an elaborate operational plan of his own. It was the middle of December 1974, a few days after they had discarded the idea of hijacking Mujib's helicopter.

Farook proceeded in a military manner. First the targets were identified. Mujib, of course, was the primary target. But on the list was also every single person or unit capable of reacting against Farook at the decisive moment. Among the civilians Farook listed some of Mujib's senior ministers and Awami Leaguers. Among these were Farook's own uncle, Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and Mansoor Ali. The major considered them dangerous because he felt they were capable of getting help from India. On the army side Farook listed Major General Shafiullah, the Chief of Staff, his deputy Major General Ziaur (Zia) Rahman and Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, the CGS who was also his own uncle and friend. Then there was the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib's storm troopers, to be taken care of.

Each of these targets had to be covered—i.e. neutralised as far as possible, eliminated if necessary. When he worked out the numbers of troops required for each task Farook found he needed a small army. 'It was more than brigade strength and I asked myself where the hell am I going to get all these troops?'

He then briefly toyed with a commando-style operation deploying 50 men for a strike on Mujib's house. Probably all 50 would have died because no blocking operation was planned and the Rakhi Bahini and other army units would have retaliated smartly. Farook discarded this plan as impractical and went back to reducing his operational plan to more manageable proportions.

At the same time he took extreme precautions against discovery. He would spend the night drawing charts, making detailed calculations, writing in target assessments and troop requirements. These he would fix in his mind. When morning came every scrap of paper would be scrupulously burnt. 'I had my wife, children, father and mother with me in the cantonment. All our lives were at stake. There was no point in taking any chances'.

Farook was similarly careful in rearranging his target list. 'Each man had to be studied carefully,' he told me. 'I used to ask myself what is his capability? Will he react or will he not react? When I found people not relevant to the problem I would cut, cut, cut.'

He made a searching study of the army commanders, particularly Brig. Khalid Musharraf, the CGS. 'I knew he was an intelligent person capable of reacting, so I decided he should be neutralised even though I had discussed things with him. Only in the final stages was I finally convinced that Khalid Musharraf would not react against me, at least, and for that matter neither would Zia or anybody else'. The assessment would prove to be amazingly accurate. After Mujib's assassination, the army commanders, like frightened sheep, fell quickly into line.

Farook finally narrowed down his list to three persons: Sheikh Mujib, his nephew Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni, and his brother-in-law, Abdur Rab Serniabat. These were the men closest to Mujib. Moni was an extremely shrewd, capable and ruthless politician with a powerful influence in labour and student groups. He was also Editor-in-Chief of the semi-official Bangladesh Times. Serniabat was acquisitive and ambitious. Like Mujib, both hated the army and had strong vested interests in Sheikh Mujib's mantle. They were also part of Bangabandhu's family.

Major Farook decided that these three men should die.



At around 10 o'clock every night that winter when the social set in the fashionable Dhanmandi area of Dhaka was settling down to the enjoyment of life, a dark figure would slip out of a cycle-rickshaw on the Mymensingh Road, Dhanmandi, and after a short walk past the lake would casually turn into Road No. 32. There was nothing about the grey-checked lungi, the dark cotton bush-shirt and the well-worn chappals (slippers) to place the sauntering figure apart from the many domestic servants relaxing in the cool air after a hard day's work. The only difference was that while the others were out for a life-sustaining breather, this dark figure was the Angel of Death. Major Farook Rahman was stalking Sheikh Mujib like the Hound of Hell.

'I could not trust anyone' he told me 'I had to check Mujib over personally for a period to see exactly what were his movements, his habits, what he did, where he went. I had to firmly establish the pattern of his life. In the final moment when my troops went into action there was no question of a single slip'.

Farook's diligence in piecing together his tactical plan was immeasurably helped by the fact that the 1st Bengal Lancers, his own troops, provided the night guard at Mujib's three-storey bungalow. A grateful nation had provided the Prime Minister with a palatial residence, Gonobaban, but Mujib used it as a private office outside the secretariat while continuing to live in his own house in Dhanmandi. All this flattered his vanity as a man of the people. But it also made him more vulnerable. Mujib however, in January, 1975, did not think of this because he was riding the crest of a new wave. He had grabbed absolute power by emasculating the Constitution and the National Assembly. With his private army, the Rakhi Bahini, rapidly multiplying, he felt he had nothing to fear from the military establishment, least of all from any army major. And he had never even heard of Farook!

'No. 32' as Mujib's bungalow in Dhanmandi was known, had a triple cordon security system. The outer ring consisted of a police post with armed police placed strategically on both sides of the house. Backing them up were the army sentries who manned the gates and patrolled the inner walls of the small compound. Mujib's handpicked personal bodyguard carrying side arms and sten guns sprawled in the ground-floor corridors of the house itself.

From their vantage point inside the compound and contacts with the domestic staff, the Bengal Lancer unit knew exactly who the visitors were and what went on in the big house. Invariably Farook would slip in for a chat with his men. Ostensibly this was to check on their vigilance, but in reality he was casually pumping them for information. He would then proceed on his nightly rounds reconnoitring the area, marking obstacles and the traffic patterns of the busy Mymensingh Road. He would repeat this at the residences of Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni. He had no Lancer sentries outside their homes to help him so he just squatted in the shadows observing everything he could.

Ranges and depths for the back-up artillery he planned to use posed a serious problem. The only area maps available were in the Operations Room of Army headquarters. To ask for even a quick glance at them would have aroused suspicion. So Farook did it the hard way. He obtained a small city map from a guide book put out by the Bangladesh Tourist Bureau. Using it as a reference, he foot-slogged his way around the city. Distances in each area were calculated with measured strides. Then he computed the angle of fire for each target and put down precisely where his blocking teams would be located.

The tension of the surveillance and the exhausting walks soon began to affect the health of the young Major, who had once turned down a position in a prestigious infantry regiment because he hated to march. Farook started taking Valium 5 tranquillisers three times a day. But by the middle of February, he had his tactical plan complete. Only the timing had to be pencilled in. On 15 February 1975 Farook noted in his diary 'OFFENSIVE PHASE'. He was ready to launch the coup.

Just before completing the Gunnery Staff Course in India, Farook's brother-in-law Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid applied for leave to make a trip to Singapore and Malaysia where he had been invited by other officers attending the course. The application was sent to Farook with the request that he push it through army headquarters. Farook, however, had plans of his own. He withheld the application and urgently summoned Rashid back to Dhaka. 'I need you,' he told him 'there are too many things happening here'. Rashid required no further urging. He had been greatly alarmed by the reports he had been getting from his family about the deteriorating situation in Bangladesh. His instincts warned him something was afoot and he didn't want to be left out. Once the course was completed he hurried back, reaching Dhaka in the middle of March.

Farook briefed Rashid about his plans and when he concurred, the two majors got down to the serious business of overthrowing Sheikh Mujib.

'Rashid and I agreed that removing Sheikh Mujib was not enough' Farook said 'There must be positive benefit. We had to have a positive goal so that at least the slide towards the hell we were heading for could be stopped. We wanted to put on the brakes. If that was done we could have achieved something'.

First, the obvious question was how to divide responsibility when they seized power. Answering my question, Rashid said: 'If we had gone for power then probably Farook—who is a very good soldier, even better than I am would have been Commander-in-Chief of the army as well as the Defence Ministry with total power over the armed forces. I would have looked after the civil administration', he added.

'Who would have been the top man, the boss?', I asked.

It was an awkward question and Rashid was embarrassed. 'Well you see ...' he said hesitatingly. 'You see ... we did not go for power because we couldn't do justice to it ...'

'You mean you were not qualified to run the country?' I interrupted.

Rashid: 'Not that alone, but also because we didn't have the support required for it'.

So the two majors decided to put in power someone who they thought could do for Bangladesh what Sheikh Mujib had failed to do. To this end, both of them began looking for candidates to replace Mujib.

Farook recalled: 'The first and obvious choice was General Zia because at least till then he was not tarnished. Till then he was the only one in whom I had a little bit of faith. A lot of junior officers who were thinking of what should be done to stop the rot used to say: "Let's find out from General Zia what we should do". But nobody dared to approach him'. Farook decided to have a try.

He had known the General, who was ten years his senior, since the latter had been his instructor in the Pakistan Military Academy. Zia was a popular figure in the Bangladesh army, with an impressive reputation. He had been commissioned in the 2nd Punjab in 1965 before transferring to the 1st East Bengal Regiment. Later he spent five years with military intelligence. Reverting

to the Bengal Regiment in 1966, Zia did a three-month stint with the British Army on the Rhine. In 1971 he gained considerable fame as the man who announced the independence of Bangladesh over Chittagong Radio after the Pakistan army cracked down on the Bengalis. Later, his war-time service as commander of 'Z Force' added to his reputation. After the liberation of Bangladesh, promotions came rapidly; Full colonel in February, 1972, Brigadier in mid-1973, Major General in October of the same year.

'At that time I had a strong respect and affection for General Zia' Farook said. 'I hoped to interest him in taking over the leadership of the country with the backing of the army.'

After much effort Farook managed to get an interview with General Zia on 20 March, 1975. It was a Thursday and when he reported to General Zia's bungalow at 7.30 pm he found Col. Moin, the Adjutant General, about to leave.

Farook said he broached the subject of his mission very cautiously. 'I was meeting the Deputy Chief of Army Staff and a Major General. If I bluntly told him that I wanted to overthrow the President of the country straightaway like that there was a very good chance that he would have arrested me with his own guards, there and then, and put me in jail. I had to go about it in a round-about way'.

Farook continued: 'Actually we came around to it by discussing the corruption and everything that was going wrong. I said the country required a change. Zia said "Yes, Yes. Let's go outside and talk" and then he took me on the lawn.'

'As we walked on the lawn I told him that we were professional soldiers who served the country and not an individual. The army and the civil government, everybody, was going down the drain. We have to have a change. We, the junior officers, have already worked it out. We want your support and your leadership'.

According to Farook, General Zia's answer was: 'I am sorry I would not like to get involved in anything like this. If you want to do something you junior officers should do it yourself. Leave me out of it'.

Curiously the Deputy Chief-of-Staff of the Bangladesh army, when informed about the impending mutiny, did not lift a little finger to protect the legally appointed President of the country. Though General Zia did not fall in with the plot he also did not arrest Farook. Instead he quietly turned a blind eye to the plotting while taking steps to secure himself. According to Farook Zia instructed his ADC that the major should on no account be allowed to see him again.

In July, 1976, while doing a TV programme in London on the killing of Sheikh Mujib I confronted Zia with what Farook had said. Zia did not deny it —nor did he confirm it. Instead he put off giving me an answer and when I persisted did his best to keep me out of the country for many years.

At the end of March 1975 Farook decided to make his move. There was no special reason for the timing; only a sudden end to patience brought on by his failure to recruit General Zia for the coup. 'I was getting frustrated and fed up with the waiting' Farook said, 'so I decided to get on with it'. Impulsively he abandoned his meticulous planning and went to see Sq. Leader Liaquat. 'What about taking off in some MiGs and doing a bit of strafing on his house,' Farook asked him. 'I'll surround the house and you can control the whole thing with your aircraft.' Liaquat's answer was an equally casual 'Let's go'. Farook then quickly outlined the operation scheduled for dawn next day the 30 March, and went off to brief the others. It was typical of Farook that he

should assume they would fall in with his bravado. But he was due for a surprise. 'I got the greatest disillusionment of my life' he said. 'People like (Major) Hafiz, Colonel Amin and Ahmed Chowdhury and the others all backed out. All these chaps had been talking big, spending nights talking like hell about doing this and that, but when it came to doing it nobody was willing to come forward'.

Everything went black for Farook. The sleepless nights, the foot-slogging, the months of surveillance, all seemed to have been wasted. The great coup had failed to get off the ground because of an unsuspected human factor: when faced with the reality of killing Mujib the other plotters got cold feet!

Sheikh Mujib, however, would not escape heart-rending grief on the day set for the aborted plot. It was the day his father died.

The collapse of the plot only confirmed Major Farook Rahman's determination to kill Sheikh Mujib. Henceforth he would go it alone. But first he took pains to draw suspicion away from himself. 'I told everybody to forget it. I withdrew completely from all discussions so that they would think that I had cooled down. I believe in tactical surprise. The idea was to let the others believe that I had gone to sleep'. Farook did this by acting the part of a carefree army officer. He took Farida to parties, picnics and every possible social occasion. Bangladesh was in turmoil, but for the moment they were the happy couple without a care in the world. It all ended with the big bash on 12 August 1975. The wedding anniversary party was intended to disarm suspicion at the crucial moment. Meanwhile Farook continued to secretly weave his web around Mujib.

He estimated he required about 800 men for his tactical plan which would have allowed him to block the Rakhi Bahini and other army units and thus avoid unnecessary fighting. But with modifications a minimum of 300 men would be sufficient for a limited purpose. These were readily available from his own troops. The 1st Bengal Lancers had been raised by him in 1972. Later as second-in-command he had selected certain of the men for private specialised commando-style training in addition to their normal duties in the Armoured Corps. These he called his 'Hunter-Killer Teams'. They were all trustworthy, stable and quiet types—'not loud talkers' and intensely loyal to him. Divided into groups of three, they had been motivated with Koranic injunctions about honesty, integrity, discipline, the love of Islam and their obligations to their fellow men. Farook had 150 Hunter-Killer teams at his disposal and he was certain he could depend on them at all times.

Farook tentatively decided that his next strike should coincide with the summer monsoons when torrential rains make the delta country a quagmire. His reasoning, again, was the fear that Mujib's death might provoke India to intervene in support of pro-Mujib elements. 'If India does anything and we are forced into a civil war then the monsoon is the one season they will be badly tied down' he said. 'If everything fails, at least we will have the protection of the monsoon'.

Meanwhile Rashid was bravely facing up to an embarrassing personal problem. Having completed the Gunnery Staff Course in India, he had automatically been posted to the Gunnery School at Jessore, near the western border with India. It was miles away from the projected action in Dhaka. Even worse, it deprived him of the command of troops. All this tended to make him a passenger in the plot. So Rashid was burning up his one month 'holiday' in Dhaka trying to drum up support for the plot within the army.

He joined in the political discussions going on in the cantonment. But he



always played it safe. 'I didn't commit myself' he said. 'Rather I used to make them commit themselves so that if anything went wrong it could be said that they had approached me, not that I had approached them'.

On one occasion he cautiously broached the subject with the Dhaka Brigade Commander, Col. Shafat Jamil. He recalled that after they had traded words about how bad things were in Bangladesh, Shafat Jamil asked him: 'Ha, Ki, korun?' (What shall we do?). Rashid promptly backed out. 'No sir' he told the colonel. 'I won't do anything unless you order me. After all you are my brigade commander'. Rashid was quite shaken by the experience. He warned Farook not to trust anyone because he feared the other officers were playing a double game and would put them in trouble.

The meeting with Shafat Jamil did, however, have a very fortunate and totally unexpected result. During their conversation, Rashid said, Shafat Jamil had suggested that instead of going to the Gunnery School at Jessore, why not request a transfer to Dhaka 'so that we can keep in touch more conveniently'. This was, to say the least, a curious suggestion and raises question marks about the Dhaka Brigade Commander's intention. It staggered Rashid. A posting to Dhaka was then beyond his wildest dreams. He immediately suspected Shafat Jamil was trying to trap him. So rather cunningly Rashid told him that any transfer request he himself made may not go down well with army headquarters. Why not the brigade commander wangle it for him? Rashid did not expect anything to come of it. But the Brigade Commander *did* oblige. Once again, in April, 1975, Major Rashid found himself commanding 2 Field Artillery very conveniently based at Dhaka.

Farook was delighted with the turn of events. The brothers-in-law could now go ahead with their plot without depending on the assistance of other officers. The 2 Field Artillery had 6 Italian Howitzers, 12 Yugoslav 105mm Howitzers and 600 troops. Farook's Lancers had 30 T-54 tanks and 800 troops. With the backing of Rashid's artillery and troops Farook was confident that the Bengal Lancers could take on the Rakhi Bahini and any infantry units that might try to go to Sheikh Mujib's assistance. The problem was how to get them together without arousing suspicion. Here Rashid came up with the answer.

According to instructions from army headquarters, the Bengal Lancers twice a month went on night training exercises. The intention was to familiarise the troops with sorting their equipment in the dark. Accordingly the tanks used to be started up and the crews put through mock firing drill while the whole area was disturbed by the noise. After six months of night training exercises the roar of the tank engines and the clatter of tracks as they moved around their base had become a regular feature of cantonment life. So the movement of the Bengal Lancers at least would not arouse suspicion. Major Rashid now proposed to his superiors that the tank regiment's night training exercises would be more meaningful if they coordinated with his artillery unit. Both units would then learn to work together as they would be expected to do in battle. Rashid's proposal made sense and was accepted with alacrity by army headquarters. Thus to Farook's delight the tanks and the field guns were brought together.

About this time Farook decided to seek celestial sanction for his terrible purpose. He sought out in the crowded Hali Shaar quarter of Chittagong a Bihari holy man who would have a powerful influence on the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Andha Hafiz (blind holy man) as he is known, was born without sight. His piety and austere life, however, had brought him the blessing of a phenomenal

extrasensory perception and the gift of prophesy. The accuracy of his predictions had won him a sizeable following, among them the Khans of Chittagong who were Major Farook's in-laws. Farook decided to consult him - and found an early opportunity to do so. The Bengal Lancers were scheduled to go to Hat Hazari near Chittagong for range firing between 7th and 11th April. When this exercise was put back by two days, Farook took time off for a quick trip to Chittagong on 2nd April to see Andha Hafiz.

Squatting on the floor of the hut Farook placed his hands in the hands of the holy man. Andha Hafiz held them gently for a long time. Clearly he was disturbed by the vibrations he was getting. Before Farook could confide the dark secret he carried, Andha Hafiz told him: 'I know you are going to do something very dangerous. Do whatever you have to do, but if you do not follow the principles I give you, you will be destroyed'. He then told Farook he must faithfully observe three things: '(1) Don't do anything for personal gain but only to serve the cause of Allah and Islam. (2) Have courage; and (3) Select the correct timing.' He also advised the major 'Wait three months. After that chances of success are good though there will be difficulties'.

Farook was deeply moved. Even the heavens were pointing to the direction in which he was moving. The three months Andha Hafiz told him to wait also coincided with his own evaluation of the best time for the coup. In his heart he knew that this time he would not fail.

On 7 June Sheikh Mujibur Rahman achieved what to him was the crowning glory of his administration - the formation of the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL pronounced Bakshal). It formally made Bangladesh a one-party state in which all political and administrative authority was personally vested in Mujib, the President. In no way was he now more powerful than when he started off as Prime Minister in January 1972, when his word was law and every wish a command to his adoring people. But as public affection waned during the 3½ years of prodigality, the declining demi-god found it necessary to assume increasingly more dictatorial powers. Now through the BKSAL Mujib sought to legalise his grip on the supreme power that public affection had ceased to offer.

With characteristic bombast Mujib described the change as 'The Second Revolution'. In fact it was nothing more than a palace coup which removed the last vestiges of democracy, justice and hope from a country whose founding was intended to epitomise these virtues.

Mujib had started the process in January of that year by ramming through the National Assembly the 4th Amendment to the Constitution. Apart from emasculating Parliament and conferring ill-concealed dictatorial powers on the President the Amendment authorised Mujib to create a one-party state. It also specified that 'when the National Party is formed a person shall:

(a) In case he is a member of Parliament on the date the National Party is formed, cease to be such member, and his seat in Parliament shall become vacant if he does not become a member of the National Party within the time fixed by the President

(b) Not be qualified for election as President or as a member of Parliament if he is not nominated as a candidate for such election by the National Party.

(c) Have no right of form, or to be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of any political party other than the National Party.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus Mujib's catch-all legislation completely shut out all opposition. No one could engage in any form of politics without being a member of BKSAL;

and BKSAL membership, according to the Party's constitution, could only be obtained with the consent of the Chairman, Sheikh Mujib. Only BKSAL, i.e. Mujib, would decide who would be candidates for election and voters would make their choice from among those empanelled by him. ('I shall nominate one, two or three persons for contesting a seat in Parliament. People will choose who is good or bad'). Nothing like this had been attempted during the worst days of West Pakistani repression.

The BKSAL system which was to have come into force on 1st September 1975 would have enabled Mujib to get his fingers deep into the soil of Bangladesh. It was an elaborate structure of tightly-controlled parallel pyramids embracing political affairs and administration. Sheikh Mujib, as President and Party Chairman, straddled both. On the political side the top tier was a 15-member Executive Committee of his closest colleagues. Among them was Syed Nazrul Islam, the Vice President; Prime Minister Mansoor Ali who was also Secretary General of the party; Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed (ranking third in the party hierarchy after Mujib) and the leader's own nephew, Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni who was designated one of the three influential party secretaries.

The next tier was a Central Committee of 115 members followed by five Committees of between 21 to 32 members dealing with labour, peasants, youth, students and women. Mujib's son Kamal was in the students committee.

Every member of each of these committees was nominated by Mujib. So also were the 61 powerful District Governors who formed the backbone of the administrative pyramid. According to Mujib they were 'to look after law and order, development works, ensure proper distribution of goods coming from abroad, allocate money for works programmes, formulate family planning schemes, do publicity and oversee production'. They would 'see whether the harvesting of paddy has been made or not, whether interest is taken by mothers and you are to stop corruption in the thanas'.<sup>4</sup>

The District Governors would also control the Bangladesh Rifles (the para military border security force), the Rakhi Bahini, police and army units stationed in their areas. They were to be the President's hands, feet and mouth and were expected to work closely with the 61 BKSAL District Secretaries who would be the Party Chairman's eyes and ears. These too would be nominated by him. In every case Sheikh Mujib's criterion for selecting people for these posts was, as he publicly admitted, 'because they are good to my eyes'.

Mujib gave a variety of reasons for creating this tight chain of command going down to each of the 65,000 villages in the country. When the 4th Amendment was passed by the National Assembly he said the one-party system was intended to implement the four State Principles - nationalism, democracy, socialist and secularism. Later, at a public meeting in Dhaka on 26 March, Mujib spoke about 'four plans' being the basis of BKSAL. 'Number one plan is to eliminate corrupt people. Number two is to increase production in fields and factories. Number three is population planning and number four is our national unity.' Then again on 21 July, while addressing the 61 District Governors designate in Dhaka Mujib said 'The change was necessary to bring about the welfare of the people, to remove oppression, injustices and suppression, so that easily and simply the constitutional structure can reach the people directly'.

Mujib's many reasons for BKSAL are not contradictory, and it could be argued that they were the facets of a radical reform of national life. But was reform what he really intended? If indeed that was his purpose then he had a curious way of going about it. In the first place he never lacked authority. Even as Prime Minister in a Westminster-style government his towering posi-

tion as Bangabandhu would have allowed him to enforce any reform he desired. Had Mujib wanted he could have sent the whole Cabinet, Parliament and Civil Service packing and replaced them with persons of his choice.

Secondly, the personnel appointed to flesh out BKSAL were the same grasping Awami Leaguers and civil servants whose incompetence and corruption had helped to bring Bangladesh to the brink of collapse. There was nothing to indicate that they had changed their ways. Thirdly, Mujib himself had not changed his style. He still confused platitudes with policies as though they were enough to conjure away the crises. And when all is said and done, Mujib's talk about removing 'oppression, injustices and repression' begs the question: Whose? Since the State's founding the people had known no other government than Sheikh Mujib's. It could therefore be correctly assumed that he was responsible for all the terror and the rot which he now professed to reform by the 'Second Revolution'.

All this makes clear that BKSAL was another one of Mujib's political games and reform was not the objective. BKSAL was intended to shut out all opposition and give him a stranglehold on the country. He would have achieved this ambition on the 1st September 1975 had he lived.

Tragically this total extinction of democracy and the perpetration of one-man rule brought no significant public protest. As before, the press and politicians acclaimed the move; even the venerable old revolutionary, Maulana Bashani, who had from time to time come out against him, announced 'total support' for Mujib's 'Second Revolution' in a statement issued from his home in Kagmari Village, Tangail, on 8th March.<sup>5</sup>

Once it was made clear that exclusion from the new system meant virtual extinction, everyone started climbing on the bandwagon. More than 500 journalists in Dhaka went in procession to Sheikh Mujib's house requesting membership of BKSAL. At the same time the editors of nine leading Dhaka newspapers similarly petitioned Mujib in the most sycophantic terms. Stating that 'after the war of liberation you have given a call to the nation to unitedly respond to the Second Revolution for the economic emancipation of the masses', the editors said they would 'feel glorified if they got the opportunity to work as BKSAL members under the leadership of Bangabandhu'.<sup>6</sup> Mujib had reason to be pleased.

Rather curiously, in the midst of all this sycophany, the one sobering thought about the new system was expressed by no other than Sheikh Mujib himself. Addressing the District Governors designate in Dhaka on 21 July, he instinctively warned them: 'The cause for alarm by the (BKSAL) members nowadays is that the people of Bangladesh reacts much and you will be smashed. It is good to remember this. You will make devoted efforts throughout (your) whole life but you do one wrong, you will perish from Bangladesh. This is the rule of Bangladesh'.

Unfortunately Sheikh Mujib did not heed his own warning. By that time his mistakes were beyond recall.

#### Notes

1. High Commissioner Sultan at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association meeting in London, 19.11.74.
2. Bangladesh Today, 12 1975.
3. *ibid*, 15 2.1975
4. *ibid*
5. *ibid*, 14 1975
6. *ibid*, 15 6 1975.

## Moshtaque is Willing

*I asked (Moshtaque), Will there be any justification at this stage if somebody takes a decision to remove Sheikh by force? He said: 'Well, probably for the country's interest it is a good thing'.*

—Major Rashid

In Farook's pocket diary, noted against the 3rd July, 1975 in large red letters, are the words START WORK. 'By that time', he told me, 'I had fixed Mujib was going to die. It didn't matter whether it was today, tomorrow or the day after. My tactical plan was ready. I had my troops'.

He continued: 'From that point, as the Americans say, all systems were Go. Whether I go myself, alone, or whatever happens, I was finally committed on 3rd July. I had completely written off everything about myself. Khalas.\* The past, the present, for me everything was dead. Suddenly I had crystallised in my mind that I would not wait longer than the 15th of August.'

Farook's diary told him that the next convenient training night exercise for the Bengal Lancers and 2nd Field Artillery was in the early hours of 15th August, a Friday. The day had a resounding significance for him, for Farook was Friday's child. All the great events of his life had occurred on Fridays. He was born on a Friday ('at the time of Azan'—the Muslim call to prayer). He defected from the Pakistan army on a Friday. He was married on Friday. The day also had great religious significance because Friday is the Muslim sabbath. Farook thought Friday would be a propitious day for the act he intended as a service to Islam.

He didn't tell Rashid about the date he had fixed for the coup because he wanted to ensure there was no last minute slip. But in the course of their discussions they mutually agreed that the strike should be well before 1st September when the BKSAL system was due to become operative. Before that date the District Governors accompanied by units of the Rakhi Bahini and the army would have taken up positions in the 61 districts. 'In that case,' Rashid said, 'the situation would have become very difficult to control because instead of being centralised in Dhaka you will have 61 different places where your enemy is spread'.

Rashid was not involved in Farook's tactical planning. The latter had a distaste for politics and after General Zia had turned him down he gave Rashid the responsibility of finding a suitable replacement for Sheikh Mujib from among the available politicians. In this department the artillery major showed an unsuspected talent for politics.

Rashid was well aware that Mujib's killing could unleash a spontaneous storm of violent opposition which they would not be able to contain with the meagre forces available to them. He therefore saw Mujib's successor not only in terms of a fairly untarnished and competent political leader, but also one

whose presence would go a long way to containing any adverse reaction to the killing.

Explaining his reasoning, Rashid said he had to eliminate four potential sources of trouble. The first was the Awami League, the monolithic party spread throughout the country which had substantial numbers of armed cadres among the youth and students. The second was the Rakhi Bahini, Mujib's 25,000 well-armed storm troopers who were personally loyal to him. These groups would either react strongly in which case it would be the end of the majors—or they would seek temporary asylum in India as they did in 1971, before returning with the assistance of Indian troops to rout Bangabandhu's killers. The third consideration, according to Rashid, was the possibility that once Mujib was killed the vengeful people might turn on the Awami Leaguers and kill them. This again could create an impossible law and order problem while at the same time provoking a flood of refugees to India with the attendant dangers of Indian intervention.

'We did not want to create a refugee problem' Rashid said, 'because it would have created another situation like that in 1971 and India would have come in. That would have been totally self-defeating.' So the fourth consideration, Rashid said, was to cut out any possible reason for Indian intervention.

'I wanted someone who would immediately make everyone sit back quietly and tell themselves, "Let's see what happens"' Rashid said. 'Once people decided to wait and see developments we would be safe'.

These considerations automatically excluded anyone from the Opposition because it would have stampeded the Awami League and Rakhi Bahini. Rashid decided he must look for Mujib's replacement from among suitable members of the Awami League's hierarchy. 'Such a person would reassure pro-Mujib groups and the Rakhi Bahini' he said. 'The public seeing another Awami Leaguer in charge would not dare to take revenge. There would be no refugees and India would have no reason to intervene.'

The coldly calculated stratagem to bring in the hated Awami League was not such a difficult decision for Rashid to swallow. He had privately decided that it would only be a temporary measure. 'We knew what they were, these men of the Sheikh Mujib group' he told me. 'We knew they will do all sorts of hypocrisy, bungling and other things. They can never get rid of it. But meanwhile if we can consolidate and get the army and the air force combined under the proper leadership structure then we can sort them out at any time'. For his part Farook had made it perfectly clear to Rashid 'If after removing Sheikh Mujib there is no positive benefit I will not tolerate anyone else'.

Despite the bold words, the two majors were showing themselves to be incredibly naive in the matter of choosing the man to succeed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The criteria that Rashid was working to were essentially security considerations, not the winning combination for a much-vaunted change. The most important requirements for the latter—statesmanship, integrity, a man who could deliver the goods where Sheikh Mujib could not—did not figure at all on Rashid's list. It was unbelievably arrogant for him, or still worse, unforgivably puerile, to assume that Khandaker Moshtaque, the man eventually chosen, would be merely a puppet who would allow himself to be used and discarded at their convenience. It was well known that Moshtaque was a 'survivor', the leading alumnus of the rough-and-tumble school of Pakistan/Awami League politics. With any intelligence Rashid should have realised, at least at their first meeting, that here was an old fox who could eat them for breakfast, which he did.

\* Urdu for finished.

Thus in the spring of 1975 a season for flowers in Bangladesh which, lamentably, has also become a season of woe—Farook and Rashid were plotting what in effect would become an assassination, not a coup; it would be a savage blood-letting that made a mockery of their pretensions to perform cleansing, health-restoring surgery. Because they had neither the wit nor the maturity to tell the difference, the majors besmirched the proud name of the army they professed to love and set in train dark forces that have been more destructive to the dream of Sonar Bangla than Sheikh Mujib ever was.

But at that time they were too absorbed in their narrow purpose to look for its wider implications. Rashid, for one, received a nasty shock from a totally unexpected quarter.

Farook's sister dropped in to say that Dhaka University was buzzing with rumours of an imminent army coup and Rashid was being named as one of the ringleaders. He instantly realised that the plotting and exchange of revolutionary ideas by the young officers had somehow been leaked by loose talk. And if the rumours had reached the university, which was a sensitive listening post, then surely they must also have got to Sheikh Mujib whose intelligence services monitored everything.

Rashid was all the more alarmed the next day when he was summoned to the office of the Dhaka Brigade Commander, Col. Shafat Jamil, the man with whom he had discussed the political situation earlier. Col. Shafat Jamil told him that there was too much talk about a coup going on and as his name was being mentioned, something may have to be done about him.

In desperation Rashid decided to take the bull by the horns.

He recalls: 'I told Shafat Jamil if anything is done to me then I will involve you as the ringleader. I will say that whatever I have done was done under your instructions. I have proof. I will say how you arranged for me to be posted to 2nd Field Artillery to be with you in Dhaka after cancelling my transfer to the Gunnery School in Jessore'.

Rashid said Col. Shafat Jamil got the message. There was no further talk about action against him. But Rashid could see the danger signs. At any time there could be a knock on the door. Like Farook, he too, by then, had become totally committed to Mujib's assassination, if only for reasons of self-preservation. He told me, 'There was no turning back now. It was either him or us'. A few days later, before the end of July, Rashid sought an interview with Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the Commerce Minister and the third ranking member of BKSAL after Chairman Mujib.

Khandaker Moshtaque was the least controversial of the Awami League ministers and generally considered to be the leader of the party's right wing—his Islamic leanings no doubt fostered by the fact that his father, Marhum Alhaj Hazrat Khandkar Kabiruddin Ahmed, known as 'Pir Sahib', was considered to be a Muslim saint in his time. Moshtaque was a year older than Sheikh Mujib. The two had been close comrades in the long struggle for Bengali emancipation during which he had been detained six times for a total of seven years in Pakistani prisons. In the process Moshtaque had also acquired a law degree from Dhaka University and built up a considerable reputation as an advocate in Dhaka High Court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

In 1971 during the freedom struggle, Moshtaque was Vice President of the Awami League. When he fled to India with his colleagues he was appointed Foreign Minister in the Mujibnagar government-in-exile based at Calcutta, headed by Tajuddin Ahmed. His right-wing views earned him a pro-American label. He did live up to that reputation when Henry Kissinger in the autumn of 1971 singled out Moshtaque in an abortive attempt to split the Awami

League and prevent the break-up of Pakistan. Because of this Moshtaque was abruptly sacked from his job as Foreign Minister when the Mujibnagar government moved to Dhaka after the formal creation of Bangladesh.

Khandaker Moshtaque served as Minister for Flood Control, Water Resources and Power in Sheikh Mujib's first Cabinet. In 1975 when Mujib switched to the presidential system of government Moshtaque became Minister for Commerce and Foreign Trade.

Moshtaque's political ability is underscored by his penchant for survival. Though always very servile and falling easily into line behind Mujib—even in the notorious BKSAL one-party system introduced just before Mujib was assassinated—Moshtaque did not share in the public odium which attended the other ministers. Nor was he ever accused of the blatant corruption that most of his Cabinet colleagues were. As such Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed nicely measured up to Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid's ideas for a replacement for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Rashid insists they are not related, though they come from the same general area of Daudkhanda in Comilla district. He also said they never had occasion to meet before then. But he was well aware of Moshtaque's reputation since they come from adjoining villages—Moshtaque from Dosphara, Rashid from Chandina. Rashid's uncle, Musharaf Hussain ('Mushu') had also befriended Moshtaque while he was escaping to India in 1971 and they had been close friends since then. Rashid asked 'Mushu' to arrange an appointment for him with Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed in Dhaka. This was easily done.

Dressed in civvies to avoid attention Rashid accordingly turned up at Moshtaque's house in Aga Masih Lane in the old quarter of Dhaka at 7 pm on 2nd of August. He took the precaution of carrying with him an application for a permit to buy a scooter just in case he was noticed and someone wanted to know why an army officer was calling on a politician. Rashid was welcomed by Moshtaque in an upstairs room, and after the normal courtesies, Rashid steered the conversation to the political situation. They spoke for almost two hours.

Rashid recalls: 'We discussed political matters for some time as I was indirectly finding out how he felt. Then I asked him, being closest to Sheikh Mujib and one of the seniormost Awami League members, how did he feel? I asked him, "Can the nation expect progress under the leadership of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman?" He said, "No, they cannot". Then I said "If that is the case why don't you leave?" He said "That is also not so easy". It showed that they (the ministers) are quite afraid of taking such a decision though they know what he is doing. They are such cowards that they have accepted all his bad doings'.

Rashid continued: 'Then I asked, "Will there be any justification at this stage if somebody takes a decision to remove Sheikh by force?" He said, "Well, probably for the country's interest it is a good thing. But it is also very difficult to do it".'

I asked Rashid to squeeze his mind and confirm if that was exactly what Moshtaque said.

He answered: 'Yes. He said it was very difficult to do, but in the country's interest if somebody could do it probably it would be a great thing'.

Question: 'So he agreed?'

Rashid: 'Yes. Yes, he agreed. Then Moshtaque even asked me that if somebody removed him (Sheikh Mujib) who could be next? The alternative should be there'.

Rashid said his own reply was non-committal. He explained to Khandaker

Moshtaque that if anyone did think in terms of removing Sheikh Mujib he would also definitely think of a suitable replacement, particularly 'someone who could balance out the political side'.

Asked if Khandaker Moshtaque had got the message that he wanted Moshtaque as a replacement for Mujib, Rashid replied: 'He probably thought that as I went there to see him I would have chosen him as such. It's quite understandable'.

Rashid was satisfied that in Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed he had found a willing replacement for Sheikh Mujib. He conveyed his impression to Farook who made no comment beyond, 'I hope you are right. That's your problem'. But in his own taciturn way Farook was happy that things were shaping up exactly as he wanted.

The revelations made by Rashid and Farook concerning Khandaker Moshtaque's prior knowledge of their plans to kill Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were made under oath in a series of separate tape-recorded interviews I had with them.

Moshtaque denies he was consulted. But I have no reason to disbelieve the two majors.

They make it clear that Moshtaque was brought into the plot to kill Mujib on 2nd August 1975, i.e. 13 days before the assassination. He thus had ample time to consult his cronies, particularly Tahiruddin Thakur, and to work out how they should proceed once the dire deed was done. Indeed, there are indications that that is what happened—and then someone in the group leaked the majors' plot to a contact in the American Embassy in Dhaka.

Farook has noted that he was surprised to find several American Embassy cars 'buzzing round the city' at the hour when his men were carrying out the killings. Then, Tahiruddin Thakur was at the Dhaka Radio station *before* Khandaker Moshtaque was taken there by Rashid. Moshtaque's speech—written by Thakur—was evidently thought out in advance. Thakur, in a post facto interview with a Western correspondent, also claimed that the assassination plot was 'finalised' in his house two nights before the event. Farook and Rashid swear they were NOT present on that occasion, and that they did not have any contact with Thakur before Mujib's killing; and at the time of the interview they were prepared to confront Thakur about his claim. So, if the former Information Minister is telling the truth, the meeting in his house on 13th August was obviously a private gathering of Moshtaque's men to 'finalise' their response to what the two majors had planned to do. This would confirm that Moshtaque had prior knowledge that Mujib was to be killed.

All this, of course, does not obviate the possibility that Moshtaque and Co. were plotting separately to overthrow Sheikh Mujib—as were many others at that time. The Maoist Sharbohara Party and another left-wing group, the JSD (Jatyo Samajtantrik Dal or Nationalist Socialist Party), it transpired, also had well-developed 'revolutionary' plans which were rudely overtaken by the majors' action.

A senior Bangladeshi intelligence officer told me that at the beginning of August 1975, his department had been investigating at least five concurrent 'possible plots' against Sheikh Mujib in addition to 'serious rumbling among young officers in the army'. One concerned a Bangladeshi politician who, on the pretext of buying Indian saris for his wife, had flown on a day-trip to Calcutta. He never left the Dum Dum airport and during that time had been observed having a lengthy meeting with a Western diplomat. Another was a report by Sheikh Moni who thought there was something sinister in the fact that a prominent politician had given a private dinner 'for some disgruntled

elements and at least three senior military men of the rank of General and Brigadier'.

Lawrence Lifschultz, the author of 'Bangladesh, the Unfinished Revolution' told an interesting story of the plotting in the Guardian (of London) on 15th August 1979, the fourth anniversary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's assassination. He said:

'Knowledgeable Bengali and foreign diplomatic sources now claim that Moshtaque and his political friends had been involved more than a year in plans designed to bring about the overthrow of Mujib. According to senior US officials at the American Embassy in Dhaka and from well-informed Bengali sources, it appears that the United States had prior knowledge of the coup which killed Mujib, and that American Embassy personnel had held discussions with individuals involved in the plot for more than six months prior to his death.

'According to one highly placed US Embassy diplomat, officials at the American Embassy were approached by people intending to overthrow the government of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This Embassy source says that a series of meetings took place with the Embassy personnel between November 1974 and January 1975. These discussions were held with the purpose of determining the attitude of the US Government towards a political change in Bangladesh if a coup d'etat were actually to happen'.

Unfortunately Lifschultz does not or cannot—identify the Bangladeshis who approached the American Embassy. The suggestion in the article is that it was some civilians, not the two majors. And I have it on oath from both Farook and Rashid that they did NOT make contact with any foreign Mission or, for that matter, any foreigner. But Lifschultz does say that a senior US official told him in January, 1975, as a matter of prudence 'we came to an understanding in the Embassy that we would stay out of it and disengage from those people'. Lifschultz continues:

'Although a decision was made at a high level in the embassy that there would be no further contact with the anti-Mujib group, what happened subsequently is a matter of controversy among US officials interviewed. Those who knew of the earlier meetings deny any personal knowledge of what happened after early 1975. Others allege that while contact was broken off at a level of diplomatic and foreign service officials, who wished to remain 'clean', liaison was taken over and carried on through the channel of the American Embassy's CIA station chief, Philip Cherry, and other station agents. When interviewed, Cherry categorically denied this allegation. "The Bangladeshis were doing it themselves" said Cherry. "It's a great canard to think any coup takes place because of a (outside) government involvement. Almost always coups take place because of the people themselves". When asked about the Moshtaque network's previous history of confidential contacts with the United States, Cherry stated: "There are politicians who frequently approach embassies and perhaps have contacts there. They think they may have contacts. But that's a far cry from any of those embassies involved in assisting them in or involvement in a coup".

Lifschultz goes on to say that in April, 1975, 'Moshtaque and his political circle were in the process of discreetly checking military contacts whom they could adopt and integrate into their own strategy' and that they favoured 'a senior officers' coup d'etat.' He added:

'According to Bangladesh military sources with intimate knowledge of the events, approaches were made to the deputy chief of army staff, Major-General Ziaur Rahman (Zia) . . . and according to these sources, General Zia expressed interest in the proposed coup plan, but expressed reluctance to take the lead in the required military action'.

Lifschultz concluded that 'having failed to secure reliable leadership for the coup from the senior officer cadre, the Moshtaque group went forward with the junior officers' plot'.

Rashid is normally very slow to act. But once he had been jolted by Farook's determination to launch the coup on the following Friday he quickly began tying together his end of the arrangements.

At 2.30 pm on 13th August he called again at Aga Masih Lane for another meeting with Khandaker Moshtaque. This was done without appointment, and they spent about ten minutes together. According to Rashid the sole purpose of his visit was to find out whether Khandaker Moshtaque had any travel plans for the next few days.

Rashid recalled: 'I asked him if he is likely to go outside the country in the immediate future. He told me he will not be going anywhere. He will be in Dhaka.'

Question: 'He didn't ask you why?'

Rashid (laughing): 'No. After all he is a very clever man and he would have known . . .'

Like Barkis, Moshtaque is willing!

Having been assured that Khandaker Moshtaque would be available on the day, Rashid began to look around for officers who could assist in the strike. The failure of the earlier moves had shown they could not depend on serving army officers so Rashid craftily hit upon the idea of recruiting ex-army officers who had a grudge against Sheikh Mujib. Such men could be counted on to fall in with the plot. The man who really came to mind was ex-Major Sharful Huq, nicknamed 'Dalim', who had been prematurely retired following the incident involving Ghazi Gholam Mustafa, Mujib's city boss, at a wedding party eighteen months earlier. Rashid knew Dalim well since he had also been an artillery officer. He telephoned to invite Dalim for a chat.

Dalim arrived at Rashid's house in the cantonment around 10 pm (13th August). Rashid briefed him in general terms about the plot without giving details of the timing or the tactical plan and asked if he would like to join them. According to Rashid, Dalim was willing but at the same time wanted to talk it over with a friend. This was ex-Major Noor who had once been ADC to General Usmani the Defence Minister, and had subsequently been retired prematurely with Dalim and some other officers in the summer of 1974.

Dalim brought Noor to Rashid's house at 1 am (14th August) that night and they had a long discussion about the plot during which Rashid stressed that for an initial period it would be necessary for Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to replace Sheikh Mujib. Noor apparently was willing to join but was not convinced that Rashid had got Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to fall in with the plot to kill Sheikh Mujib. To reassure him, Rashid suggested that they met at 5 pm that day (August 14th) outside the Atomic Research Centre. He would take them to Khandaker Moshtaque's house to prove how friendly he was with him.

When Rashid turned up at the rendezvous, he was surprised to find Noor with another retired officer, ex-Major Shariar who he had not met before. Rashid began to have misgivings about his companions but decided that by

that time he had no way out. So when Noor assured him that Shariar could be trusted, the three of them went off to Khandaker Moshtaque's house.

Though no appointment had been made, they were quickly ushered in to see the Minister. Khandaker Moshtaque received Rashid warmly and was introduced to the others. Rashid explained they had just dropped in to greet him and after a few pleasantries they left. Apparently the experience was enough to convince Noor and Shariar that Rashid had an understanding with Moshtaque. 'After that' Rashid said 'they told me that "any time you want our help we will be with you".'

Rashid asked Dalim, Noor and Shariar to join him and Farook at 10 pm at the new airport beyond the Cantonment where his unit would be on night training exercises. To make sure they would come he held out the bait that they could see at first hand the military preparations and could also have a fuller discussion about details of the plot. Even at that late stage Rashid was not prepared to trust the other conspirators with the whole truth that he had himself learnt from Farook only 48 hours earlier. Sheikh Mujib was to be killed the next morning.



# The Killing of Sheikh Mujib

*His time has run out . . . Do it very secretly.*

Andha Hafiz

Sitting in a broken-down taxi in the middle of a Chittagong bazaar, Farook's wife Farida was bathed in a nervous sweat. For over an hour she had been trying to get to Hali Shaar with an urgent message for Andha Hafiz. It was a little after 11 am on 14th August 1975 and she was running out of time.

Farida had arrived in the port city the previous afternoon with her mother who was returning home from Dhaka after the mid-week anniversary party. Farook had sent her to consult the blind holy man, and his instructions were explicit: 'Tell him I'm going to do it on the 15th. That I'm doing it in the cause of Islam and the State, with faith in Allah that what I am doing will benefit the people. Tell him also that I'm not doing it for personal desire or ambition. I am prepared to follow the path of Allah, whichever way He wills. I want him to tell me if I'm doing wrong or right or if there is anything else I must do.'

Farook had asked Farida to telephone Andha Hafiz's answer to him in Dhaka by noon. She was not going to make the deadline. 'We had much difficulty in getting a baby taxi' (three-wheeler) she recalled, 'and the one we finally got broke down several times'. When she eventually reached the holy man's house the taxi driver, instead of apologising for the trouble, demanded 27 Takkas for the trip.

Farida found Andha Hafiz dressed in a lungi and cotton vest, sitting cross-legged on a low wooden bed. Assorted garments hung from a rope stretched across the single room. As she sat on a cane stool in front of him Farida remembered getting the scent of unseen flowers and a cooling breeze which quickly made her comfortable. Finding no sign of a fan, the thought crossed her mind that heaven had a way of keeping Andha Hafiz cool.

The blind man held her hand as he quietly listened to Farook's message. After what seemed to be an agony of waiting, he let out a deep sigh and with some emotion in his voice told her in Urdu: 'His time has run out. Do what you have to do but do it very secretly.' There was another long silence. Then he earnestly advised her to tell Farook that before he undertook his task he must pray with the fullest sincerity for God's support. His commanders must do likewise. He also gave her two 'Suras' which, he said, Farook must recite constantly 'so that his mind would be fixed with a holy zeal and he could think of nothing else.' One of these Suras was the Muslim prayer for the dead. The other was an invocation to ward off evil.

As she got up to leave Farida asked Andha Hafiz to pray for her husband and his companions. 'Don't worry,' he gently comforted her, 'I have placed them in the hands of God. It's His will. He will take care of them.'

Farida's troubles were not yet over. When she returned to her father's house she found the telephone lines to Dhaka were not working. Two hours later there was no answer from Farook's telephone. Farida then telephoned her sister's house and got a very bad connection. In desperation she called her

father-in-law. 'Find Farook and ask him to telephone me urgently,' she implored him. Dr Rahman found his son at home fast asleep. Apparently the young major had returned home early and finding nothing to do had decided to take a nap. It was 5 pm before Farida finally passed on the fateful message.

Andha Hafiz was not the only one to see doom in Sheikh Mujib's stars. A senior member of the President's personal staff, Ruhul Quddus, was a well known amateur palmist. He had read Mujib's palm at the beginning of July. What he saw apparently alarmed him so much that he quickly set off with his wife for 'extended medical treatment' in Europe. The presentiment saved his neck. He was out of the country when Mujib was killed and the Bangladesh government for many months unsuccessfully tried to get him back.

Fate, it seemed, was also working against Mujib's family. The marriage of his niece, his favourite sister's daughter, on 10th August had brought the clan together in Dhaka. Serniabat's sons had come in from Khulna for the occasion bringing with them several close friends. They all stayed on in Dhaka because Serniabat on 14th August was observing his dead mother's 'Chelum', the 40th day ceremony which marks, for Muslims, the end of the period of mourning. Thus the entire family was concentrated within a half square mile of Dhan- mandi when Farook and Rashid decided to strike.

Though the majors had not banked on it, Mujib was made even more vulnerable by a remarkable coincidence. Brigadier Nur Zaman, the tough commandant of the Rakhi Bahini, was on a visit to Europe. His second in command was a relatively junior officer who was acting independently for the first time. Thus Mujib's elite storm troopers were not geared, as they normally were, for instant action.

On that fateful day in August, Sheikh Mujib was blissfully riding a crest. The BKSAL apparatus for a one-party state was complete. The 61 District Governors would be in their posts after the weekend. Mujib himself had another trick up his sleeve. He was scheduled to make an important speech at Dhaka University next day, when it had been secretly arranged that by public acclamation he should be declared President for Life. With the Opposition shut out and his own position firmly nailed down, there would be nothing to touch him. Mujib was not to know what the majors were up to, although the reports he was getting suggested that something was cooking in the Cantonment. Mujib therefore concentrated his intelligence work where his Pakistani experience had taught him the danger lay—the army commanders. He did not bother about the junior officers. The mistake cost him his life.

Night training exercises for the 1st Bengal Lancers and the 2nd Field Artillery on 14th August began normally at 10 pm. None of the officers or the 600 men of the two units gathered at the yet incomplete new Dhaka airport beyond the Cantonment or in the tank garages nearby, had even a suspicion of the momentous operation their commanding officers had planned for them. Majors Farook and Rashid were observing Andha Hafiz's exhortation to secrecy in the strictest possible way.

The only thing out of the ordinary that night was the fact that one of the artillery regiments' three company-strength batteries had been ordered to dismount, arm themselves with rifles and proceed in 12 trucks to the exercise staging area. Even that order did not raise eyebrows since Major Rashid, on resuming command of the regiment, had often varied the training routine.

Rashid assembled six 105mm Yugoslav-made Howitzers with plenty of ammunition on the airport perimeter. The crews did not know it, but the guns, according to Rashid's 'practice' orders, were soon zero'd on the Rakhi Bahini headquarters barracks four miles away. Eleven other field guns were

kept in the unit headquarters with crews at standby. The eighteenth gun in the regimental arsenal Rashid ordered to be taken with crew to the Lancers' garage a quarter of a mile away where Major Farook had started up twenty-eight T-54 tanks in the usual way. Due to mechanical failure he was that night two short of the normal complement.

Apart from the CO's there were only four officers from each unit present. Two other officers—not fully trusted—had been told to skip the exercise. The troops were another matter. Every available man of each unit had been mustered. It is significant of Mujib's faded image that both Farook and Rashid had not the slightest doubt that the troops—common men all of them—when ordered would not hesitate to come out against Mujib.

Rashid had till the last moment been trying to bring in an infantry unit so that the coup, for political reasons, could seem to represent a cross-section of the army. To this end he had that morning telephoned an old friend, Major Shahjehan, the acting commandant of the 16th Bengal Infantry stationed at Joydevpur, to bring his troops to the new airport in Dhaka for an unscheduled combined training exercise. He did not confide in Shahjehan but was confident that once the infantry unit had arrived on the scene he could talk it into joining the plot. The unsuspecting Major Shahjehan accepted Rashid's suggestion and promised to march his troops to Dhaka by 10 pm. Rashid was now anxiously waiting for the 16th Bengal Infantry and his fellow conspirators, ex-Majors Dalim, Noor and Shariar.

There was no sign of them at 10.30 pm when Shahjehan came through on the telephone to say his men were too tired and that he was calling off the rendezvous. When given this disappointing news Farook bitterly remarked, 'It seems that the Bengal Tigers have become pussy cats!'

Meanwhile, there was still no sign of Dalim and his companions. They turned up at 11 pm bringing along Major Pasha and Major Huda. The latter was a serving military intelligence officer and a good friend of Dalim since they had once served together in the artillery corps. Rashid took the group and his 12 trucks to join Farook at the tank garages. It was only around midnight that the details of the operation were finally made known to all.

Farook, who was in overall command of the operation, quickly briefed them on the reasons and the purpose of the strike and asked if they would like to join. When they all agreed, he immediately got down to business.

With his well-worn tourist map of Dhaka City spread on the squadron office table, Farook ticked off the various points he wanted blocked. One tank would block the runway at Dhaka airport and the troops would control the bridge on the Mirpur Road. Other teams were sent to the radio station, to Bangababan and the New Market where the Pielkhana Barracks of the Bangladesh Rifles were located. Three big teams ranging from 75 to 150 men were assigned to the principal targets—Sheikh Mujib, Abdur Rab Serniabat and Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni. Dalim was asked to lead the assault on Mujib's bungalow. He declined, probably because of his own family's close ties with the President's family. Instead he volunteered for Serniabat's house. Ex-Major Noor and Major Mohiuddin with one company of Lancers were assigned the task of knocking off Sheikh Mujib. Farook's trusted NCO, Risaldar Muslehuddin (nicknamed 'Muslim') was to lead the assault on Sheikh Moni. Their instructions were that they should kill Sheikh Mujib, Serniabat and Moni. Mujib's sons Kamal and Jamal were to be taken prisoner. No one else was to be touched. But they were given the latitude to proceed according to developments and, if necessary 'wipe out anything en route'. This opened the door for the subsequent massacre.

Rashid's job, according to Farook, was a 'political' one. When the operation got under way he had to rope in Sq. Leader Liaquat and have him stand by with the MiGs in case out-station army units tried to come into Dhaka. Rashid had two other responsibilities. One was to take Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed to the radio station, announce the overthrow of Sheikh Mujib and introduce Moshtaque as the new President. The other was to try to win over Brigade headquarters and the top army brass after the assassination. Farook had a deep psychological insight into the mental processes of his fellow officers. He knew they would take at least two hours to mobilise any of the army units stationed in Dhaka. He was also certain that once it was established that Sheikh Mujib was dead, the army commanders would hesitate to make a move lest it endanger their own lives and jobs. So he did not bother to keep them covered. Instead he sent Rashid to win them over once the dreadful killing was done.

In the event Farook was proved remarkably correct.

At the same time Farook had no doubt whatsoever that he would achieve his principal targets. The three teams had been instructed to proceed expeditiously, 'wiping out anything en route' that tried to stop them. Even if the officers failed, he knew his Lancer boys would not. So he kept for himself the most difficult and dicey part of the whole operation—the containment of the Rakhi Bahini.

In normal circumstances, and given the element of surprise, it would not have been very difficult for 28 tanks to neutralise 3000 men of the Rakhi Bahini grouped in a single compound near the new Assembly Building. But the hard fact was that Farook's tanks were totally unarmed and sitting ducks for anyone who decided to stand up and fight. They did not have a single round of ammunition between them. Even the machine guns could not be operated. All tank ammunition, he said, was locked away safely in the Ordnance Depot at Joydevpur. Sheikh Mujib, who in the first place did not want to accept the gift of tanks from Egypt, had tried to make certain that they would never be used against him. Farook, however, had other ideas—and he was banking on an incredible bluff to pull it off.

'Few people really understand how effective the tank is as a psychological weapon', he told me 'When you see one coming towards you it takes a really brave man not to run away. We knew our tanks were unarmed. Not more than a handful of men in GHQ shared this knowledge but they could not be absolutely sure about it. So as far as everybody else was concerned the tanks were very lethal and ready to blast anything that moved'. And, he added with a laugh: 'Who would have thought I would be so mad as to take on the Rakhi Bahini and GHQ with a string of unarmed tanks!'

By 4.40 am Farook had his strike group organised and ready to go. Rashid's artillery crews on the apron of the new airport and, in the unit area, stood by their guns. Lined up in the Lancers' garages were 28 tanks, 12 trucks, three jeeps and a 105mm Howitzer with a total of just over 400 men. Two-thirds of them were in the distinctive black uniforms of the Bengal Lancers which henceforth Bangladeshis would learn to dread.

Incredibly these massive preparations were made just 300 yards from the GHQ Field Intelligence Unit which was supposed to operate round the clock. As a precaution Farook had posted sentries outside its barbed wire fencing with orders to grab anyone who might venture out to investigate. No one did. Apparently the routine normality of the tanks' night training exercises had disarmed everyone.

Half an hour later as the column moved out with Farook in the lead tank he heard the 'Azan', the Muslim call to prayer, wafted on the heavy monsoon



air by the loudspeakers of the Cantonment mosque. The undulating call was sweet music to his ears. He had been born on Friday at the time of the Azan. Now on another Friday with the Azan once more ringing in his ears he would either start a new life or he would die. Again he repeated the Suras that Andha Hafiz had given. Then he waved his killer teams forward and breaking out of line they sped off on their dreadful mission.

Farook's only stop on the way out of the Cantonment was the Ammunition Sub-Depot. He had a sneaking suspicion that he might find some tank ammunition or at least some bullet belts for the machine guns stored there. So he swung his tank into the compound and with its gun bashed the door down. A quick search revealed nothing he could use. Now the only weapon he had available to him was the sten gun resting across his knees. The bluff would have to work!

The tank column drove slowly down Benani Road, turned right and proceeded towards the Cantonment check point. On the way it passed a group of men in white shorts and singlets. They were troops of the 4th and 1st Bengal Infantry on their morning P.T. The men interrupted their drill to wave to the tanks. Farook's men smugly waved back. Incredibly the large tank column outside its normal area had not aroused suspicion. The only person to take notice was Farook's father. Dr Rahman, who had just finished his morning prayers, looked out of the window as the tanks went by. He thought it odd that they should be out and that too so early. And he wondered where they were going.

Once clear of the Cantonment area, the tanks surged forward, crashing through the airport wall. One tank broke off to control the runway, another to the helipad where half a dozen helicopters were parked. Nothing was going to land or take off from Dhaka airport. The other tanks swung round the Plant Protection Centre and raced across the fields towards the Rakhi Bahini headquarters. Farook looked at his watch. It was 5.15 am. The killer teams should be on target.

On reaching the perimeter wall of the airport Farook discovered there was only one tank following him. Somehow he had lost the other 24. Undaunted he charged ahead. Crashing through the compound wall, he knocked down two trees and swung round the Rakhi Bahini barracks. What he saw took his breath away.

'Suddenly I found a brigade of 3000 Rakhi Bahini lined up six rows deep,' he recalled. 'They were battle equipped - steel helmets, rifles, packs, everything. There was no backing out after that.'

'The driver said, "What am I supposed to do?"'

'I told him, you just drive past them six inches from their noses. I ordered the gunner to keep the gun pointed straight at them. I told the other chaps in the turret to look brave.'

'As we slowly drove past them the Rakhi Bahini kept looking at us. We kept looking back at them. It was a tense moment. I told the driver if they start anything just steer right and run over them.'

'It was not necessary. They could hear gunfire in the distance and here suddenly were the tanks. No one moved a finger.'

Since the Rakhi Bahini had not reacted instantly and attacked the tanks, Farook was certain they would stay put. Once more his assessment was tellingly accurate. Supremely confident that he had won the day Farook left the other tank to menace Mujib's storm troops and drove on to Dhanmandi.

The scene at No. 32 Dhanmandi was chaotic.

The main killer team led by Majors Mohiuddin, Noor and Huda, had raced

through the deserted streets getting to Sheikh Mujib's residence at approximately 5.15 am. They had 120 men squeezed into five trucks and the 105mm Howitzer which was quickly set up on the main Mirpur Road at the corner of the lake and diagonally opposite the house. Other troops in more trucks blocked off the surrounding area. Then the majors and the men went in.

The armed police guards posted on the perimeter outside the compound were taken completely by surprise and quietly submitted when they saw the heavily armed troops in black uniform. The Lancer sentries at the gate were not in the plot. But when they saw their colleagues and some officers in black uniforms, they quietly stepped aside and allowed them to pass. By this time, however, Mujib's personal bodyguards sleeping on the ground floor verandah were awakened by the commotion in the compound. Seeing strange men with guns pouring through the gate they grabbed their automatics and fired at them. Shamsul Islam of the Artillery was hit in the head and died on the spot. Another trooper, this one from the Lancers, was badly wounded. Seeing their comrades fall and realising from the heavy fire coming from the house that the game was up, the troops opened up with everything they had. Within minutes they killed Mujib's bodyguards and began systematically searching the rooms on the ground floor.

Meanwhile the Howitzer crew panicked when they heard the firing. Fearing that the resistance may be too great they opened fire with the big gun. Two rounds were fired, hitting the lake on both occasions. Then they elevated the guns and fired six more rounds missing the house each time. The shooting was so wild that one of the shells travelled four miles to Mohamadpur, killing two people and wounding several others in a Bihari household.

Mujib's older sons, Kamal and Jamal, momentarily held off the attackers with sten guns. Then Kamal was killed at the foot of the stairs. But before this he had injured two more of the attackers.

Mujib himself was quick to react. First he telephoned the Rakhi Bahini headquarters, but in the absence of their CO Brigadier Nur Zaman and Colonel Sabihuddin, he could not get through to any senior officer. In desperation Mujib phoned General Shafiullah, the Chief of Army Staff, and Brigadier Mashorul Huq, his Military Secretary, asking them to send help immediately. The last call was made to Col. Jamil, Director of Military Intelligence, who Mujib had specially selected for the job a fortnight earlier. Jamil responded quickly. Throwing a dressing gown over his pyjamas he hurried to the President's assistance in his red Volkswagen, but was stopped before he could turn into Road No. 32. There was a sharp argument and when he got out of his car and tried to push his way past the troops they shot him dead.

By this time the killers were swarming everywhere. Mohiuddin, Huda and Noor ran from room to room looking for Mujib. Mohiuddin unexpectedly found him. He was going up to the first floor and had just reached the landing at the turn of the stairs when he saw Sheikh Mujib standing not 20 feet above him. Mujib was wearing a white kurta and grey checked lungi and carried a pipe in his hand.

Although he had set out to kill him, Major Mohiuddin was thoroughly demoralised when face-to-face with Mujib. 'Sir, apne ashun' (Sir, please come) Mohiuddin stammered.

'What do you want?' Mujib asked him scornfully in Bengali. 'Have you come to kill me? Forget it! The Pakistan army couldn't do it. Who are you that you think you can?'

Mujib was obviously playing for time. He had made some telephone calls. Help must surely be on the way. Meanwhile he was putting on a bold face.

When relating the events to me in great detail later, Farook remarked: 'Mujib had quite a personality and Mohiuddin was completely dominated by him. I don't know what would have happened if Noor had not arrived at that moment'.

Mohiuddin kept repeating: 'Sir, apne ashun.' Mujib kept talking back rudely. Noor, who had stepped on to the landing, gun in hand, immediately sensed that Mujib was stalling. So brushing Mohiuddin aside and, according to Farook, screaming something unintelligible, Noor fired a burst from his sten gun. Mujib didn't have a chance. The bullets tore a huge hole in his right side. His body twisted backwards with the impact. Then it slipped, face down, towards the bottom of the stairs. The pipe was still gripped tightly in the right hand.

The time was 5.40 am. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's tempestuous love affair with the Bengalis had come to an end.

Begum Mujib tried to follow her husband when the shooting flared. She was killed in front of her bedroom door by another burst of automatic fire. Then the massacre continued.

Officers and troops went from door to door, shooting the bolts away and spraying the rooms with sten gun fire. Mujib's second son Jamal, the young Sandhurst-trained army lieutenant, had gathered the rest of the family in the main bedroom for protection. Now it was his turn to die. He was blasted at close range by one of the officers. Nine years later the marks of his blood, bone and muscle tissue—and the bullets—could be clearly seen on a large section of the wall against which he was thrown.

The two young daughters-in-law, the new brides of Kamal and Jamal, were huddled on the bed with their arms round Russell, Mujib's 10-year-old son, who had been named after the great philosopher. They were roughly dragged apart and mercilessly shot dead at close quarters. So also was the young Russell who apparently tried to hide behind the furniture. Sheikh Nasir, Mujib's younger brother, who had made a vast fortune after independence, was killed in an adjoining bathroom where he had been hiding.

The evidence of the whole dreadful episode remains frozen in a nightmare tableau because Sheikh Hasina, the elder of Mujib's two daughters who escaped the killing since they were out of the country, has not yet disturbed anything in the house of death.

The attackers appear to have made a systematic search for valuables, much of which they looted. The rooms have been thoroughly ransacked. Every cupboard, drawer and receptacle has been broken open and their contents scattered about. There's a shambles everywhere and the lingering smell of death.

Mujib was to suffer a further ignominy after he was killed. According to Farook, one of the attackers had never seen Mujib at close quarters. So to get a good look at his face, the man slipped a boot under Mujib's body and rudely flipped it over. It was thus that the shattered remains of Bangabandhu, the friend of the Bengalis, was snapped four hours later by a photographer specially brought for the purpose from the Government's Information Department.

Not far from Sheikh Mujib's house, the Serniabats and Sheikh Moni were also under attack.

Dalim's team got to the Serniabats' residence at about 5.15 am. There was only a police guard at the gate and probably to frighten him off the troops started shooting. The gunfire awakened the household. Abu Hasnat, the Cabinet Minister's 30-year-old son, recalls looking out of his bedroom window and

seeing soldiers in black uniforms shooting at the house. Grabbing the sten gun he always kept with him, Hasnat ran down to the first floor to awaken his father. Abdur Rab Serniabat was already on the telephone trying to call Sheikh Mujib for help. The line was busy. When he tried again he managed to get through.

'Father told Bangabandhu our house was being attacked by miscreants,' Hasnat recalled. 'My father told him to send help. At that moment I could hear someone shouting from the other end of the line. My father listened. He was shocked by what he heard. I got the impression that he had been informed that miscreants were also attacking Bangabandhu. My father didn't say another word. He put the phone down and sat on the bed. He just looked at me without talking.'

Hasnat went to a window and began shooting at the troops. 'I just pulled the trigger and emptied the magazine. When the bullets were finished I ran upstairs to the store to get some more bullets'. The action saved his life. Moments later troops burst into the bedroom and killed Serniabat where he sat. Then they herded everyone they could find into the drawing room on the ground floor.

Meanwhile Hasnat was in the loft desperately trying to break open the trunk where he kept spare magazines for his sten gun. As he tried to break the lock he could hear firing and the sound of boots approaching on the stairs. Leaving his gun on the floor Hasnat jumped and tried to squeeze himself through the skylight hoping he could escape onto the roof. He couldn't get through. So he jumped down and sat on the floor of the loft waiting for the men to come and kill him. Nothing happened.

For 20 minutes he could hear shouts and occasional bursts of gunfire. After a while the commotion died down and he could hear troops stomping out into the road. Hasnat waited a long time till everything was silent. Then very carefully he crept downstairs. He found the drawing room a shambles of blood, bodies and broken furniture. His wife, mother and 20-year-old sister were badly wounded and bleeding. His two young daughters, uninjured, were sobbing behind a sofa where they had hidden during the massacre. Lying dead on the floor were his 5-year-old son, two sisters aged 10 and 15 and his 11-year-old brother, the family ayah (maid) a houseboy and his cousin Shahidul Islam Serniabat. The latter wore a big moustache and looked a lot like Hasnat. Evidently the attackers had mistaken him for Serniabat's son and killed him. Of the 10 friends who had come along with the family from Barisal for the wedding of Mujib's niece four days earlier, one was killed and five wounded. Hasnat later slipped out of the house and escaped to India.

The attack on Sheikh Moni was brief and devastating. Apparently he was a light sleeper and when Risaldar Muslehuddin and his men drove up to the house in two army trucks, Moni quickly jumped out of bed. Seeing the troops he called out to inquire whether they had been assigned to guard him. Muslehuddin asked Moni to come out and when he did he tried to grab hold of him. At this point Moni's wife, who was seven months pregnant, jumped in front of her husband to protect him. Both were killed by a single burst from a sten gun. No other person was touched. Mission accomplished, Muslehuddin and his men drove to Mujib's house.

When the others had gone on their deadly mission, Rashid made straight for Sq. Leader Liaquat's house to alert him to stand by with his MiGs. It took a few minutes to get him out of bed and to brief him. Liaquat refused to do anything without orders from the Chief of Air Staff. So leaving him, Rashid

dashed off to see Major Hafiz, Brigade Major of the 46th Infantry Brigade (Dhaka Brigade) who was involved in the earlier plotting but backed out at the last moment. Rashid wanted Hafiz to bring out the 1st East Bengal since Major Shahjehan and the 16th East Bengal had failed to come from Joydevpur. He hoped the Brigade Major would not now hesitate to act since the operation had already been launched.

Hafiz, however, refused to call out the infantry. He would not move without instructions from the Brigade Commander or the Chief of Staff. There was some argument and Hafiz tried to get his CO, Colonel Shafat Jamil, on the telephone. When he failed to get through Rashid got him into his jeep and drove off to Shafat Jamil's house. They were entering the compound when they heard the first salvoes from the Howitzer coming from the direction of Dhanmandi.

Rashid said he told the Brigade Commander about the strike. 'Sir, we have gone for action to remove Sheikh...' Shafat Jamil, he recalls, was shocked and very angry. He too could hear the guns booming in the distance. There followed loud exchanges between the two officers, when the telephone rang. It was General Shafiullah calling to say he had received a call from Sheikh Mujib that some soldiers were attacking his house and he wanted the Dhaka Brigade to mobilise immediately to go to his assistance.

'I told him (Jamil) that it's too late to do something since we have already gone for it,' Rashid said. 'Shafat Jamil put down the telephone. He was furious but did nothing. Then he told me, "I must go and see General Ziaur Rahman". I didn't bother to stop him.' Rashid got into his jeep and rushed to Dhanmandi.

After Rashid left, Shafat Jamil received another telephone call from General Shafiullah, who was crying as he informed him that Sheikh Mujib had been killed. The Army Chief appeared to have broken down completely and failed to give the Dhaka Brigade commander instructions to quell the mutiny. So quickly throwing on his uniform, Shafat Jamil walked over to General Zia's house. He found him shaving.

After recounting Rashid's visit and the telephone calls from General Shafiullah, Shafat Jamil told Zia: 'The President has been killed, Sir. What are your orders?'

Zia, he recalled, was quite calm, evidently aware of what had happened. Zia answered: 'If the President is no longer there, then the Vice President is there. Go to your headquarters and wait there.'

Zia clearly was not going to be pushed into any hasty action. Sheikh Mujib was dead. The situation was extremely fluid and unclear. So General Zia, like the other senior officers as Farook had suspected, decided to wait and see.

When he reached Sheikh Mujib's house Rashid found everything quiet. The troops were milling about outside and in answer to his query confirmed that Bangabandhu was indeed dead. Rashid said he was upset to hear that the family had also been slaughtered. His political perception made him keenly aware that this was a blunder of the first magnitude. It would turn public opinion against them and also disgrace them internationally. At the same time Rashid did not blame the troops because, as he put it, 'it was a military operation and civilians can get killed.' Nevertheless he was too squeamish to go inside the house. Instead he turned his jeep and returned to Brigade Headquarters in the Cantonment.

Rashid recalls: 'Colonel Shafat Jamil and the other senior officers were there. I told them that since it is confirmed that Sheikh has been killed there is no

question of interference or any action by them. They should stay where they are and be prepared just in case the Rakhi Bahini move and they have to counter it.'

He said the officers were angry but also silent and afraid. 'Everybody was wondering what should happen to them now that Sheikh Mujib had gone and no one did anything.'

Meanwhile Farook, having confirmed Sheikh Mujib was dead, had secured the city. Taking 10 of his tanks he returned to Rakhi Bahini headquarters to confront the Acting CO. 'The man was shaking in his boots' he recalled. 'Seeing the tanks all lined up he thought I had come to get him'. Farook informed him that the Rakhi Bahini had been merged with the army and would be subject to orders from the army and army headquarters. Then he got on the phone and spoke to the Director of Military Operations, Colonel Noorudin. Farook talked him into bringing the Rakhi Bahini under military orders. Once that was accomplished Mujib's storm troops ceased to be a threat.

Later, going down Mirpur Road past Sheikh Mujib's house, Farook was flagged down by a Lancer picket. They had three men securely tied on the ground. 'We caught them going to the house' they told him excitedly. 'Shall we kill them?' Looking down Farook could not make out who the two younger men were. The third he recognised immediately. It was Brigadier Mashoorul Haq, Military Secretary to the President, the man who had presented Farida with the big bouquet three days earlier. Farook calmed his troops. There would be no more killing.

Farook continued: 'I then lined up my tanks and marched the column back via the 2nd Capital Road, Farm Gate, right into the Cantonment and parked them in front of Brigade Headquarters. I told them there: 'We are placing ourselves under your command'.

The officers in Brigade Headquarters were understandably non-plussed. What do you tell a brash young tank commander who has just knocked off the President? One or two congratulated Farook. The rest were angry, silent. 'I could feel their hostility' Farook said, 'as if they were telling me "you are a pariah, not wanted"'. When I tried to be nice to Colonel Shafat Jamil he turned on me savagely. "Who told you to give advice. You keep your mouth shut".'

Rashid said the success of their operation tempted him to consider making a grab for power, instead of installing Khandaker Moshtaque as President. He quickly took stock of the situation. The Rakhi Bahini had been cowed into submission by Farook's tanks. GHQ was in a state of paralytic shock. The army was in disarray but with a little persuasion now that the deed was done, it could be counted on to rally round the majors. He was also confident that the people were not shedding any tears for Mujib. But he was not sure what the public reaction would be once it became known that the families had also been slaughtered.

That was Rashid's main concern at the moment, and while giving it thought, he put off going to Moshtaque's house for about 20 minutes. Then he heard Dalim, contrary to instructions, announcing on the radio that Mujib had been killed and the army under Moshtaque had seized power. Dalim also said that martial law had been imposed on the country which henceforth would be known as the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh.

Apparently Dalim and some of the other retired officers 'with typical indiscipline and rashness' Rashid said—had rushed to the radio station after killing Sheikh Mujib and Serniabat. There they fought over the microphone,

each wanting to be the first to break the news. Then Dalim grabbed it and made the announcement in his name.

The broadcast shocked Rashid into action. 'I knew it would create a problem for us', he said, 'because the brigades outside Dhaka would want to know how Dalim, a retired officer, had staged a military coup which could only be done by the army. How could such a man speak for the army? They would not accept it.'

Dismissing the thought of grabbing power, Rashid went post haste to Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed's house.

## VIII

### Moshtaque Takes Over

*I went into the toilet and while sitting there I began to prepare myself in my mind about what was to come.*

Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed

At 7.30 am Rashid's jeep, followed by a solitary tank, snaked through one of Dhaka's older quarters into Aga Masih Lane and came to a stop outside Khandaker Moshtaque's house. It was an old-fashioned three-storey building sandwiched between even older houses in a tiny square. The clatter of the tank tracks had electrified the run-down neighbourhood. Hundreds of people, already staggered by Dalim's fateful radio broadcast, had instantly gathered to watch the drama unfold before their very eyes. They perched silently in windows, on the roofs and at other vantage points in the square, but keeping well away from the tank.

Looking through the top-floor balcony Moshtaque was shaken to find the venomous mouth of the tank's cannon pointing in his direction. Moments later, Rashid, dishevelled and carrying a sten gun, ran up the stairs followed by two armed soldiers.

Though the Major, during their three previous meetings, had made no secret of his intention to give him Sheikh Mujib's job, Moshtaque was too much a politician to fully trust another man, especially when he was a military officer in frightful circumstances such as these. The long wait after Dalim's radio announcement, and now the tank, had unnerved him. He was full of misgivings. Moshtaque gave me a vivid account of the episode in two lengthy interviews on 11th and 12th December, 1975, after he had been thrown out of office by the counter-coups.

'I was not sure whether they had come to kill me,' he recalled. 'They were looking very disturbed and had guns in their hands. I kept looking at their hands to see what they were going to do. When I saw that instead of pointing their guns at me one or two of them were saluting, I felt relieved. So I took courage and asked. "What brings you here?"' If nothing else, Moshtaque is an excellent actor.

Rashid told Moshtaque he wanted him to take over as President and for that purpose must accompany him to the radio station. The words were music to Moshtaque's ears. Still he was hesitant. He did not yet fully trust Rashid and decided to test him. 'How do we go?' he asked the major. 'Do we go in your jeep or in my car?' The intention here was to ascertain whether he would drive with dignity in his own car or as a prisoner in the military jeep. Rashid told Moshtaque they could use his car if the driver could be trusted. Now even more relieved, Moshtaque said he told the major: 'Alright, give me some time. I have something to do and I have to put on my clothes.'

He continued: 'I went into the toilet and while sitting there I began to prepare myself in my mind about what was to come. This gave me some time to think.'

When they went down to the car, Moshtaque, still a little apprehensive, put Rashid to another test. 'I was wondering who would open the door?' he told me. 'My anxiety was to make sure they were not bluffing me. If I was made to open the door myself it would have meant one thing—they were in fact taking me to be killed. If someone else opened it for me then I would be sure they were being respectful. So I waited for a few moments.'

The matter was resolved when one of the soldiers, saluting smartly, opened the door of the car and politely indicated he should get in. Moshtaque's doubts were swept away. He had, at last, made it to the top. 'It was,' he recalled, 'a wonderful drama'.

On the way to the radio station, Moshtaque was even more gratified to find no display of public resentment at the killing of Sheikh Mujib. 'People appeared to be shocked and bewildered,' he said, 'but as we went along I could see some of them cheering. You know, success has many parents!'

Though oozing confidence when they reached the radio station Moshtaque still had one nagging fear in his mind. The majors had engineered the coup and had chosen him to replace Mujib, but how would the Service Chiefs and the rest of the army take it? He knew he would not be fully secure till they also had been nailed down. He therefore suggested to Rashid that the Service Chiefs be brought in. Rashid thought it was a good idea. He went off to the Cantonment, leaving Moshtaque with Tahiruddin Thakur, the Minister of State for Information, who was finalising his speech. In the headquarters of the 1st Bengal Regiment Rashid found Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, the CGS, along with Colonel Shafat Jamil and some other officers. He asked the CGS to arrange for the tank ammunition and found him most willing to oblige. Khalid Musharraf also assured Rashid he would muster the Service Chiefs for him. Within half an hour he brought in Major General Shafiullah, Air Vice Marshall Khondkar, and Commodore M. H. Khan. Major-General Ziaur Rahman, the Deputy Chief of Staff, also arrived with them.

Rashid briefed the Service Chiefs about what they had done and asked for their cooperation. 'We have done it for the greater interest of the country' he told them. 'We are not seeking power for ourselves and we don't disown you. Rather we want your leadership. So you come to the radio station and do what you have to do.'

As Farook had anticipated, once they knew Mujib was dead the military brass quickly fell into line. At that stage no one dared to take on the majors.

What transpired next was vividly described to me by Khandaker Moshtaque: 'I am a good lawyer and know how to trap a man' he gloated. 'Since I was being pushed into the saddle I had to get the allegiance of the Forces. So I shouted at Shafiullah, "Tell me have you done this?". Now Shafiullah was in a very awkward position. In front of him were the majors who had killed Sheikh, and he couldn't back out for fear of his own life. So he told me quietly "Yes, we have done it." Then I proceeded one by one to ask the same question of the other Chiefs of the Services. One by one they admitted they had done it. I could see they were very frightened. They had no alternative.'

Moshtaque continued: 'I then asked them: "What do you want me to do?" They told me: "Please take over. You are the only acceptable person in Bangladesh." I told them I am a civilian and a democrat and not an army person. I will only take over if we have a purely civilian and a democratic government and you will not have anything to do with it.' (Moshtaque didn't try to explain—and in the circumstances I didn't want to embarrass him by asking—by what mental gymnastics he was conferring the dignity of 'democratic

government' on a regime brought to power by treachery, assassination and military coup.)

The military officers, Moshtaque said, went into a huddle in another room, returning about half an hour later to confirm acceptance of his terms. He then quickly put them on the air one by one to swear allegiance to his government. By 11.15 am when he finally made his own broadcast, Moshtaque had gained complete mastery of the situation. The majors may have made him President, but he bottled them up with the army. He was not going to be anyone's puppet.

In his first broadcast President Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed excelled even Sheikh Mujib in bombast and in exploiting the people's gullability. He described the killing and the coup as 'a historical necessity.' He said 'everybody wanted to change the administrative system but since it was not possible through available means that armed forces had come forward to change the government . . . they have opened the golden gates of opportunity before the people.' Moshtaque also solemnly pledged 'in unambiguous terms that this government will never compromise with any type of corruption, nepotism or social vices.' But he was lying in his teeth. For even as he spoke he was compromising with the most heinous of crimes—murder.

Moshtaque was guilty of another public deception which some Western newspapers dubbed as 'The case of the Missing Islamic Republic'.

Dalim's announcement early that morning had led everyone to believe that Bangladesh was now an 'Islamic Republic'. Farook and Rashid also intended it to be so. Moshtaque, however, had his own ideas. He had no intention of changing the country's secular character. But very cleverly he did not announce his unpopular decision at that time. Instead he fooled everyone by liberally lacing his speech with invocation to Allah and concluded with the exhortation 'Bangladesh Zindabad', the Urdu equivalent of 'Joi Bangla' (Long live Bengal) which had been Mujib's rallying cry to the Bengalis. At the end of it all the people, 85% of whom are Muslim, were left with the impression that a new Islamic dispensation had been installed. It was only later that they would learn the bitter truth. Bangladesh was not an Islamic State. Sheikh Mujib's international commitments and his professed domestic objectives were also unchanged. In essence President Moshtaque was carrying on in the traditions of the Awami League. But by that time Khandaker Moshtaque had consolidated his position and it was too late to complain.

Moshtaque's speech caused tremendous confusion in Britain where there is a sizeable Bangladeshi community. Pious Muslims who had exulted when Dalim first announced the establishment of the Islamic Republic, were crestfallen when the text of Moshtaque's broadcast was known. Hundreds of telephone calls were made to the High Commission in London for clarification.

One caller asked Deputy High Commissioner Farook Chowdhury, 'Is it or is it not an Islamic Republic?'. When the official said there was no change, he was disgustedly told, 'If this is the case then why did you kill Sheikh?'.

The Bangladeshis were not the only ones to be fooled by Moshtaque's adroit reversal of the declaration of the 'Islamic Republic'. Saudi Arabia was also taken in. Though they had repeatedly expressed goodwill for the people, the Saudis had resisted recognition of Bangladesh for three and a half years because they felt the Muslim people should have an Islamic state. Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury, Bangladesh's first President, who later became Sheikh Mujib's travelling envoy, explained the Saudi position to me when recounting a meeting he had with the late King Faisal in January, 1974.

According to Justice Chowdhury, King Faisal wanted clarification of what was meant by the Article in the Bangladesh Constitution relating to secularism. 'I told the King' he said with semantics that would have amazed King Solomon, 'that, as President of the Republic of Bangladesh, on various occasions I had referred to this particular Article and said that it did not mean irreligiousness. It merely meant that all persons professing different faiths would be treated with equality in the affairs of the state, i.e. they could profess and practice their own religion and maintain their religious institutions and should have equal opportunities in life. Since a very small minority does not profess the faith of Islam, Your Majesty might treat it as an Islamic country.'

Justice Chowdhury continued: 'For a time it looked as if the King was impressed by my argument. But then he said he would be happy if the word 'secularism' was omitted from the Constitution and it is declared as an Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. He further met my point about tolerance of other religions by saying an Article specifying that the minorities would not be oppressed would be an adequate protection for them.' King Faisal was not fooled. He did not grant recognition to secular Bangladesh. But the Saudi government under King Khalid on hearing the news of Mujib's assassination and Dalim's declaration of an Islamic Republic, rushed in with the long-denied recognition. I have not been able to discover by what verbal gymnastics Justice Chowdhury, as Moshtaque's Foreign Minister, was able to mollify the Saudi embarrassment if indeed he did—when the new President retained the country's secular status.

Meanwhile on that fateful day, events were moving swiftly in Dhaka. With fore-knowledge of what the majors had planned, Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed had ample time to formulate his plans and thus was able to move with precision and purpose in the midst of the general confusion.

First he imposed martial law, and ordered an indefinite curfew throughout the country. But here again, as a sop to religious sentiment, he took pains to ensure that there was a three-hour break in the curfew so that the faithful might go to the mosques for Jumma (Friday) prayers. Next he appointed a Vice President and a 10-men Cabinet which excluded members of Sheikh Mujib's inner circle. Among the new appointees were Justice Abu Syed Chowdhury and Dr. A. R. Malik, Farook's uncle who was a university Vice Chancellor. He was made Finance Minister. The new President suspended some of Mujib's most trusted officials and placed them on the transfer list. Moshtaque also arrested several politicians, among them Ghazi Gholam Mustafa and Abdus Samad Azad, the man who had replaced him as Foreign Minister when he was dumped from the job a few days after independence. He also granted interviews to ambassadors, and the press, radio and TV were quickly orchestrated to praise the new dispensation and denounce the old.

The sycophants needed no encouragement to switch loyalties. They went in droves to the President's house to fawn on Moshtaque, and any of the majors they could find. Congratulatory telegrams and letters poured in from everywhere.

No tears were shed for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Maulana Bashani, who had a few months earlier pledged 'total support' for Mujib's 'Second Revolution', quickly issued a statement welcoming the historic change and offering fullest support to Khandaker Moshtaque's government. In London a group of young Bangladeshis stormed the High Commission tearing down Mujib's photographs and assaulting his personal intelligence officer. The High Commissioner, Syed Abdus Sultan, who had always shown himself greatly devoted to Mujib, and was one of his most trusted appointees, instead of

having the boys arrested for trespassing and vandalism, entertained them to tea in his office after removing the many photographs of Mujib which normally adorned the room.

In Dhaka Khandaker Moshtaque lost no time in tidying up the evidence of the massacre in Dhanmandi. Mujib's family, along with the Serniabats and the Monis were quietly buried in Benani graveyard in the Cantonment. Mujib's body alone was flown by Air Force helicopter to Tungipara and buried in the village graveyard. It was there that Bangabandhu's final humiliation took place. According to Brigadier Manzoor, when the news of the coup and assassination became known some villagers broke in and looted Mujib's ancestral home.

A few hours after installing Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed as President, Farook and Rashid placed themselves at the disposal of the Army Headquarters, but were not allowed to rejoin their units. Not only were they a source of embarrassment and fear to the military commanders but they were also the target of much hostility from those officers who had earlier conspired with them for the overthrow of Sheikh Mujib, but had backed out at the last moment. The problem was solved by Khandaker Moshtaque. For his own security he insisted that the two majors remain with him in the President's house at all times.

Although he had connived with the majors in the overthrow of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and now clung to them for protection, Khandaker Moshtaque, like his predecessor, had a basic mistrust and dislike for all things military. He too was after all basically an Awami Leaguer who had suffered at the hands of Pakistan's military rulers. The military 'monster' that Mujib feared had now reared its head. Moshtaque was quick to perceive that unless he demolished it by restoring military discipline and re-establishing civil authority over the armed forces, he would not be able to consolidate his position as President. To put down the military, therefore, became Moshtaque's pre-occupation during his 83 days in office.

But he faced many obstacles to his plans. The most important was Farook and Rashid's insistence that Major General Ziaur Rahman should replace Major General Shafiullah as Chief of the Army Staff. Later, despite Moshtaque's reservations, they brought in another man of their choice to head the Bangladesh Air Force. He was Group Captain Towab, a former Pakistan air force officer who had for a time served as the senior air officer with the Mujibnagar government-in-exile in Calcutta. Towab was living in retirement with his German wife in Munich when Rashid went there to recruit him.

Moshtaque was disinclined to appoint General Zia as Chief of Army Staff for two reasons. First, he did not trust him. It was essentially a gut feeling, but Moshtaque was not the one to invalidate his intuition. Time would prove how right it was. Secondly, Zia, unlike the other senior army officers, was popular with the troops. This was anathema to Moshtaque for he firmly believed that such a commander must be regarded as a potentially dangerous rival. So he did the next best thing. While appointing Zia as Chief of Army Staff, Moshtaque made sure he was tightly boxed in and made ineffective by his own nominees.

Rashid was supposed to be advising him on army matters. But without consulting the major, Moshtaque created the post of Chief of Defence Staff ranking above the three Service Chiefs (and above Zia)—and appointed Major General Khalilur Rahman, Commandant of the Bangladesh Rifles, to the job. Major General Ershad, who was on a staff course in India, was given his second promotion in four months and brought in as Zia's deputy. Brigadier



Khalid Musharraf had been Zia's rival for promotion. Moshtaque retained him in the sensitive position as CGS (Chief of General Staff) under Zia. On top of all of them he placed General M. A. G. Osmani, Mujib's first Defence Minister, as his own Defence Adviser. Known as the 'Papa Tiger' because he was Colonel-in-Chief of the Bengal Regiment, Osmani was an old-style officer and a gentleman who lived by the Military Manual. Moshtaque found him the ideal person to oversee what he grandly described as the restoration of discipline in the Armed Forces.

In fact Moshtaque was doing the opposite.

Recalling his actions, Brigadier Manzoor regretfully told me later: 'Moshtaque outdid Mujib in his mistreatment of the Forces. He was clever and cunning. He played one against the other and he set up the bureaucrats against the Army'. General Zia, who was present on the occasion, nodded his head in agreement.

On 26th September Moshtaque indemnified Mujib's killers against punishment for their crimes. It took the form of 'THE INDEMNITY ORDINANCE, 1975' issued on the authority of the President of Bangladesh and published in a Gazette Extraordinary—but without the usual publicity in the media. There was good reason for the secrecy for surely there would have been a public outcry had its contents been known.

Hidden by the legal verbiage was total exculpation for the Majors, their men and all those involved with them not only in respect of the killings and the coup of 15th August, but also in the planning and abetment of it. In effect it was a comprehensive pardon for the men who had slaughtered the Founding Father of the nation and 21 members of his family.

In the circumstances, no one expected Moshtaque to prosecute Mujib's killers. But to formally pardon them is an entirely different thing. I was told later that not even Farook and Rashid expected it or thought it necessary. But Moshtaque, ever the casuist, was playing it safe for his was more than a casual role in the grisly affair. I don't know whether he issued himself an 'indemnity certificate' like the others were promised. Certainly the terms of the Ordinance were broad enough even for this purpose.

The pardoning of the killers, the promotion of Farook and Rashid from major to Lt. Colonel, and the most extravagant praise he heaped on them in a radio broadcast on October 3 he called them 'the sons of the sun of the armed forces' had the most shattering effect on the morale and discipline in the armed forces. Clearly established for officers and men was the precedent that anything is permissible—mutiny, mayhem, murder—only don't get caught doing it. All this would foster widespread unrest and Bonapartism, attempted coups and counter-coups, and General Zia Rahman's assassination in Chittagong seven years later.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, by his free-wheeling ways, broke the sequence of crime and punishment in Bangladesh and for betraying the people brought down upon himself and the country a terrible legacy of blood. Khandaker Moshtaque, during the brief 83 days of his stewardship, formally cemented the break and multiplied the legacy many times over.

Despite the bombast of his first radio broadcast, Moshtaque had few innovations to his credit during the first ten days in office. One, which was given front-page coverage in the government-controlled press, was the introduction of a new form of national head-dress—a black 'nehru' cap similar to the one he wore, but used by few others in Bangladesh at that time.<sup>1</sup>

However, during this time Moshtaque took steps to remove all possible

rivals in the political field. He reckoned the main threat, apart from the unstable army, came from his old party, the Awami League. Its leaders could become a rallying point for the opposition. So as soon as he was satisfied that the country had accepted Mujib's killing, Moshtaque quickly rounded up the four men who had been most prominent in the Mujibnagar government in Calcutta—Tajuddin Ahmad, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman. Here again, Moshtaque acted with extreme guile to disarm public opinion.

Mansoor Ali, till recently the Prime Minister, was invited to Bangababan where he was photographed being effusively received by Moshtaque. While the pictures were being shown on TV that night, poor Mansoor Ali was quietly whisked off to jail. Syed Nazrul Islam, the former Vice President, and Kamruzzaman, who had been Mujib's confidant, were then jailed without fuss. So was Tajuddin, who had been dismissed for publicly criticising Mujib and still enjoyed countrywide respect.

Peter Gill, who was the last journalist to see Tajuddin alive, recorded the event in the Sunday Telegraph:

'As I approached his house I saw Mr Ahmad being escorted to a military jeep by an army officer. The house was ringed by about 30 soldiers and more soldiers were crammed into an army Land Rover. I walked to the jeep and with all the naivety at my command asked Mr Tajuddin Ahmad whether he was about to join the new army-backed government of President Ahmed. "I don't think so," he replied. Then after a glance at the army officer in the driving seat he added: "I'm being taken to an army detention camp,"'<sup>2</sup>

While in jail these four political leaders became the object of a diabolical 'contingency plan' which would ultimately result in their massacre there two months later.

Farook told me three people—Farook himself, Rashid and Khandaker Moshtaque—were privy to the plan which was intended as a contingency in the event of a counter-coup. They had decided on it when Moshtaque made his first visit to his village home in Dhospara because they felt he would be extremely vulnerable when he left the safety of the tanks in Bangababan.

'If we could bump off Sheikh Mujib,' Farook explained, 'then we reckoned others could do the same to Khandaker Moshtaque. You must remember that the possibility of a counter-coup was very real. In that case the four politicians in jail would have been the obvious choice of anyone trying to form an alternative government, probably backed by India. So they had to be removed.'

Accordingly it was agreed that should Moshtaque be killed or there be a counter-coup, two things would be done immediately. One, the Chief Justice (at that time Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem) would be immediately sworn in as President to avoid a governmental vacuum. Simultaneously, a 'combat' team from the President's House would rush to Dhaka central jail and kill Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman. Assigned to the latter task was one of Farook's 'hunter-killer teams'—the three- to five-man specially trained and motivated squads he had earlier boasted about. This was one put in charge of Farook's most trusted men, Risaldar, now Hon. Lieutenant, Muslehuddin. He was the Lancer who led the killer team to Sheikh Fazlul Huq Moni's house on 15th August. Thus the diabolical murders were planned in the most cold-blooded way.

'The contingency plan was expressly designed to operate automatically,' Farook added. How true his words! Operate it did with the most baleful results

on 3rd November when Khalid Musharraf launched his counter-coup.

On 6th September 1975, just three weeks after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's death, a dapper, middle-aged Bengali, wearing a spotless silk achkan (knee-length shirt) over white 'churidar pyjamas' (Jodhpur-style cotton pants), flew into London from Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, and checked into the plush Carlton Towers Hotel at Knightsbridge. He had an expensive penthouse suite, but money was no consideration. Mahmood Ali was in London on a special mission which he hoped to turn into the crowning glory of an otherwise disappointing life: the undoing of Bangladesh and the reunification of Pakistan.

As Special Adviser to Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Mahmood Ali had come out to establish contact with the new Bangladesh regime. Specifically it was to sound out how far Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed would go in establishing the 'link' special relationship—with Pakistan that Mr. Bhutto had suggested to Sheikh Mujib when he released him from prison in December 1971.

Mahmood Ali, however, had plans of his own, a grand design, far exceeding his official brief. No one, not even his boss, Mr. Bhutto, I was to learn, would stand in his way. 'I want reunification of Pakistan,' he told me in an interview in his hotel, 'This Bangladesh thing must be finished with.'

As an old Muslim Leaguer, Mahmood Ali, like some other Bengalis living in Pakistan, had never accepted the fact of Bangladesh and was dedicated to its undoing. He had always worked for the reunification of Pakistan and, he explained to me, had for four years 'tenaciously clung with great faith to this eventuality'. Now apparently, he felt the great moment was at hand. He was in constant touch with Dhaka by telephone and was patiently 'waiting for the great news'.

Mahmood Ali's jubilation was understandable. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, though not wanting reunification, by his actions had encouraged such wishful thinking. On assuming office after Mujib's death Moshtaque had given Bangladesh a decidedly pro-Pakistan posture. Justice Abu Sayed Chowdhury, his Foreign Minister, told me: 'Our foreign policy was pro-Pakistan, pro-Islamic countries, pro-America.' Moshtaque sent Pir Muslehuddin (Dadu Miah) as a special emissary to Islamabad and quickly established diplomatic relations with Pakistan—something that Sheikh Mujib had refused to do till Pakistan agreed to give Bangladesh its share of the national assets. Furthermore, Moshtaque had surrounded himself with government officials who had been closely identified with Pakistan during the Liberation movement. Among them were Shafiul Azam, Tabarak Hussain, Salhauddin and A. B. S. Safdar.

Shafiul Azam was intensely disliked by the FFs and Awami Leaguers because he had continued to serve as Chief Secretary of East Pakistan province after the Pakistan army had cracked down on the Bengalis in March, 1971, at the start of the Liberation War. Moshtaque appointed him Cabinet Secretary of the new Bangladesh government. Salhauddin, who had been Home Secretary of East Pakistan provincial government in 1971, was brought back from a foreign job to become Home Secretary of Bangladesh. A. B. S. Safdar, a former senior office in the Pakistan intelligence service, was appointed Director General of the National Security Intelligence (NSI), the country's top intelligence agency.

Tabarak Hussain, a senior Pakistan foreign service officer, had a family connection with the former Pakistan President, General Yahya Khan, who had ordered the genocide in Bangladesh in 1971. Tabarak served the Pakistan

government through most of the Bengali freedom struggle. After repatriation to Bangladesh in 1973 he was mercilessly ostracised by his colleagues in the Foreign Office in Dhaka. He lingered for several months as an O.S.D. (Officer on Special Duty which in the bureaucratic parlance means 'Officer without responsibility'). I had known him well in Pakistan and when we met again in Dhaka in February, 1974, Tabarak was lying with a broken leg in the corridor of an open ward in a local hospital totally neglected by his colleagues. He was hoping that Mujib would ultimately give him 'a small embassy in one of the Gulf states'. Khandaker Moshtaque brought him in as Foreign Secretary, the most senior position in the Foreign Service.

Later, when he took over, General Ershad would drop them one by one. But at that time all those appointments had encouraged Mahmood Ali and others like him to hope that Khandaker Moshtaque, with some encouragement, would take the decisive step for the reunification of Pakistan.

Mahmood Ali told me that although Khandaker Moshtaque, 'because of immaturity', had failed to endorse the re-naming of Bangladesh as an 'Islamic Republic', he was confident that it was Moshtaque's intention 'to reverse the course set in December, 1971'. He had therefore proposed to Moshtaque through intermediaries a loose form of confederation which would unite Bangladesh and Pakistan 'under one name and one flag' while leaving the details of other relationships to be worked out in due course. Mahmood Ali felt Moshtaque was very vulnerable 'because the army could demolish him at any time'. He thought it would be to Moshtaque's advantage 'to come out soon with the one thing that could make him unassailable—the re-establishment of the link with Pakistan which 80 per cent of the people want'.

'I told him (Moshtaque) waiting would be dangerous and he must act now,' Mahmood Ali confided. 'What I want from him is a simple declaration of intent. Let him say that Pakistan is one again and no one on earth will be able to contradict it. The details can be worked out later.'

I asked Mahmood Ali if he seriously believed that the Bangladeshis would want to go back to Pakistan after all that they had suffered in 1971. There were other obstacles. A confederation pre-supposed a paramount authority and either Bhutto or Khandaker Moshtaque would have to step down to a junior position. That was something that neither would be inclined to do. Mahmood Ali admitted that Prime Minister Bhutto was an 'obstacle' to the reunification of Pakistan. He said, however, that Mr. Bhutto was seriously troubled by a revolt by his party stalwarts such as Mustafa Khar and Hanif Ramay and he would go the way Mujib did 'unless he can sweep away the opposition by giving them Bangladesh back'.

Bhutto, it was clear, had no such intention. At about the time Mahmood Ali was talking to me in London, Foreign Minister Aziz Ahmad was telling his Bangladesh counterpart during the UN General Assembly session in New York that Pakistan wanted close ties with Bangladesh, a state-to-state relationship, even a special one, but nothing more. According to Justice Chowdhury, Aziz Ahmad told him: 'There are certain over-enthusiastic persons who want many things but we are not encouraging them. We have to keep them under restraint.'

Mahmood Ali waited three weeks in London for the fateful announcement from Dhaka. It never came. Evidently someone in Bangladesh had strung him along. Khandaker Moshtaque would never have dared to put the clock back. Had he tried to do so he would have been immediately killed by the Majors Farook and Rashid, both staunch nationalists. Farook told me: 'If anyone wanted to hand over Bangladesh to someone else, I would have blown his

bloody head off'.

Three months later, when we had occasion to discuss it, General Ziaur Rahman told me he had been 'extremely suspicious about Moshtaque hob-nobbing with Pakistanis'. 'Immediately after Mujib was killed,' he said, 'several Bengalis who had been living in Pakistan rushed to England and started wangling how they could come to Bangladesh which they called the "new Pakistan"'. Similarly some Bengalis who had been underground for some years in Bangladesh suddenly surfaced in London all intent on resuming relations with Pakistan. All of us were quite amazed and were wondering what they were trying to do—but really, the answer was obvious,' Zia added.

China's long overdue recognition gave Moshtaque's ego a big boost. But otherwise things were not going well for him as the summer made way for autumn. Despite the best efforts of the government's propaganda machinery, Information Minister Tahiruddin Thakur (who had earlier slaved with equal diligence for Mujib), was unable to dispel widespread public confusion about Moshtaque's policies. On the one hand Moshtaque hob-nobbed with pro-Pakistan elements and lost no occasion to speak out loudly about Islam and Islamic practices. On the other, he also paradoxically clung to Mujib's secular line. The absurdity of this stance was highlighted by a government White Paper on the economy issued on 12th September, 1975.

Moshtaque had appointed an Economic Task Force to identify the economic problems in an obvious attempt to expose Mujib's wrong-doings. The Task Force completed its work in a record 12 days. The report was then incorporated in a White Paper which staggered the country by recommending: 'The immediate task is to put the economy on an even keel and bring back sanity, rationality and discipline in economic policy and management . . . keeping in view the four basic state principles, namely DEMOCRACY, SOCIALISM, SECULARISM and NATIONALISM . . .' Surely there was something wrong. The 'Four Principles' they referred to had been the 'Four Pillars of Mujibism', the self-same banners that brought Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to an early grave. Yet here was Khandaker Moshtaque, the self-proclaimed product of the 'historical necessity' to change the system, clinging with the same pomposity to Mujib's jargon in his government's first White Paper. No wonder people were bewildered. Why had Sheikh Mujib to die? Seeing this, the Majors who had put Moshtaque in power became daily more restive.

On the 3rd October, the 50th day of his regime, Khandaker Moshtaque went on TV and radio to announce 'the decision to restore to the people their lost democratic rights'. Restrictions on political activity would be lifted from 15th August (1976) and General Elections held on the following 28th February (1977) for a parliament and parliamentary form of government. This shrewd political move was widely acclaimed. Also well received was the announcement that the government had decided to release political prisoners and Moshtaque's flat assurance that 'There is now no warrant of arrest pending against political leaders only for their political beliefs'. Moshtaque again was not exactly telling the truth. At least four senior politicians—Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman—were still locked up in Dhaka Central Jail with no hope of early release.

Moshtaque took the opportunity in his broadcast to apply a soothing balm to the ruffled feathers of the Majors and their men by extravagantly referring to them as 'the valiant sons of the sun of the armed forces'. Cynical Bangladeshis however derided this remark. They had in the past seven weeks come to know only too well the dark side of the Sons of the Sun! The courtier

sycophants, the corrupt and corrupting bureaucrats and businessmen had gone to work again within hours of Sheikh Mujib's murder. With their well-developed antennae they had accurately homed in on the real source of power, the Majors and their men. Farook recalled: 'I could have made millions of dollars, leave alone takkas, within a week. But I refused to see any of those chaps'. Rashid confirmed he had received reports that some of the retired officers involved in the coup 'were making money left and right'. Not to be outdone, some of the Lancers and Artillery men had also run wild. Military intelligence reports at that time indicated that these jawans and NCOs and some of the retired Majors and Captains had set up extortion and protection rackets. 'They began to sport expensive watches and gadgets,' I was told, 'and lots and lots of money.' Acton's dictum 'All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely' had begun to exert itself. So Farook's 'revolution'—the great cleansing operation he had undertaken—and specifically his reasons for killing Sheikh Mujib had all come to naught!

Farook and Rashid also had other reasons for concern. First, their attempts to programme Moshtaque were clearly falling on deaf ears. He shamelessly used them, but their 'advice' was adroitly diverted to the bureaucratic maze 'for action', it was said, and invariably got buried there. Secondly, it was particularly galling for Farook and Rashid to find that Moshtaque and Tahiruddin Thakur were secretly but nonetheless effectively fostering the legend that they, not the majors, had been the principal factors in the 15th August coup. Thus Farook and Rashid found themselves not only isolated and bottled up by Moshtaque, but also denied what they felt was well-deserved public recognition and acceptance.

'Suddenly they (Moshtaque and Tahiruddin Thakur) were the heroes and we were the killer dogs,' Farook complained. Rashid was equally bitter. 'He (Moshtaque) should have been a little grateful to us as we have picked him for the President's post. But he was a politician and it's in their blood and nature to betray. He has never been a straightfoward chap.'

The majors decided to remedy this with a 10-page document highlighting their deeds and intentions which they decided to make public. Explaining the move in fractured English, Rashid said: 'First thing we wanted to clarify is why it was essential to kill Sheikh and why we gave power to Moshtaque. Otherwise if things turned out good, he would claim benefit. If they turned out bad, we would get the blame. In both ways he was riding our backs. We did not want to go down in history as assassins.'

Moshtaque was not amused by Rashid and Farook's plans to publicise themselves. However he tactfully suggested that Tahiruddin Thakur could improve upon the draft, perhaps do a better job for the Majors. So the draft Rashid had made was handed over to him. Somehow it was never completed.

Although he kept them in limbo in Bangababan without any official position, Moshtaque did allow the two majors to stand on equal terms with the generals and to join them in discussions of high policy. On one such occasion, four days after the killing of Mujib, the Chief of Army Staff, General Shafulah, called a conference of Formation Commanders and Principal Staff Officers at Army Headquarters. Farook and Rashid were also present. Shafulah informed the assembled officers that President Moshtaque had sent the two majors to 'explain why they killed Sheikh Mujib and we will have to listen'. Rashid started off recounting the law and order situation and why Sheikh Mujib had to be replaced by President Moshtaque. Before he could proceed further, he was angrily interrupted by Col. Shafat Jamil shouting: 'Moshtaque is not my president. He is a self-made president, not elected, and I

owe no allegiance. He is a usurper, conspirator and murderer and at the first opportunity I'll overthrow him.' The Dhaka Brigade commander who told me about the incident said his outburst caused consternation among the officers and a speedy end to the conference. The majors did not attempt to address the Formation Commanders again, but they did make their presence felt at Army Headquarters. Moshtaque allowed them to do so. And he turned a blind eye to the depredations of Farook and Rashid's men and some of the retired officers from the group that killed Sheikh Mujib. Thus instead of stamping out indiscipline as he publicly promised, Moshtaque in fact kept the army in turmoil.

General Zia would later tell me: 'He (Moshtaque) used the majors for his own protection and did not mind if he destroyed them in the process. He played on their fears and the fears of the Bengal Lancers and Artillery men, thus dividing and creating indiscipline in the Army.'

It was an uncomfortable situation all round. Here were two majors, still formally within the army, yet outside its discipline and chain of command, with powerful armoured and artillery units at their disposal. Rashid periodically descended on General Zia at the Chief of Staff's office to 'discuss' problems or to make 'suggestions'. At the same time the commander of the Bengal Lancers, Col. Momin, received his instructions from Major Farook Rahman, still nominally his second-in-command. Farook's arrogance was particularly galling to the army brass. Having complained to Moshtaque about the lack of personal transport, he had been given the run of the President's motor pool. So Farook used to sport about in the President's Cadillac or Mercedes limousines to the immense irritation of his seniors. Inevitably these anomalies became intolerable. Plotting in the army against Moshtaque and the Majors developed in earnest.

Towards the end of September a young infantry officer was caught trying to subvert some of the Lancers who were guarding Bangababban. The matter was promptly reported to Farook and Rashid who interrogated the man and, so they claimed, discovered he had been put up to it by Brigadier Khalid Mus-harraf and Colonel Shafat Jamil. Rashid took the 'evidence' to General Zia with the request for appropriate action. Zia promised to look into it. Nothing happened. Rashid said he had the same experience on many other occasions when he reported such incidents to the General.

'Zia kept telling me, "Rashid don't you worry. If anything happens it will be over my dead body." I think he was either a coward or very clever,' said Rashid. 'He may have been hoping we will knock out each other and give him the benefit.'

Khandaker Moshtaque, who also accused General Zia of ignoring his warnings, was even more caustic in an interview he gave me at Dhaka on 12th December, 1975, a little more than a month after he had been forced out of office. 'Before 2nd November,' he said, 'even the rickshaw men were knowing that something was going to happen. I knew it. Everybody knew it. Yet they couldn't see it. What were they doing?'

Who are the 'they' you are referring to, I asked Moshtaque. He replied: 'Those fellows in the Cantonment. Those men who call themselves generals and who really are small majors. What were they doing? Ninety-eight per cent of the officers were with me, yet they couldn't protect the President against the two per cent? They are miserable failures.' Then, in a pointed reference to General Zia, Moshtaque added: 'Let me tell you again, he (Zia) is like a small major, inexperienced, unintelligent, ambitious-minded. He couldn't defend the Cantonment. How can he defend the country? Yet he is ambitious.'



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after he had been killed by the majors. His body lies sprawled on the staircase of his home in Dhaka with the right hand still clutching his favourite pipe.



*General Ziaur Rahman, assassinated President of Bangladesh.*



*Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in Dhaka in 1974. Once implacable political foes, they got together as fairweather friends after Pakistan broke up with Mujib becoming the Founding Father of Bangladesh and Bhutto President of what remained of Pakistan.*



*Major Farook Rahman, 2nd in charge, Bengal Lancers,*



*Major Khandaker Abdur Rashid, CO of 2nd Field Artillery. Farook's brother in law and partner in Mujib's assassination.*



*On returning triumphantly to Dhaka after the liberation war, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman receiving a Judas kiss from Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed who connived at his assassination and succeeded him as President for 93 days in 1975.*



Andha Hafiz, the blind holy man in Chittagong, who gave Major Farook a talisman for the killing



**BATMEN EXTRAORDINARY:** Air Vice Marshal Towab and Admiral M. H. Khan, the Air Force and Navy Chiefs, pinning new badges of rank on Khalid Musharraf, leader of the short-lived coup in November 1975, who promoted himself to Major General. A day later Khalid was killed during the Sepoy Mutiny and the Air Force and Navy Chiefs switched loyalty to the new Army strongman, Major General Ziaur Rahman

Registered No. DA-1

THE



BANGLADESH

GAZETTE

Extraordinary  
Published by Authority

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1975

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH  
MINISTRY OF LAW, PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND JUSTICE  
(Law and Parliamentary Affairs Division)

NOTIFICATION  
Dacca, the 26th September 1975

No. 692 Pub. The following Ordinance made by the President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, on the 26th September, 1975, is hereby published for general information:—

**THE INDEMNITY ORDINANCE, 1975**  
Ordinance No. XLX of 1975

an  
ORDINANCE

*to restrict the taking of any legal or other proceedings in respect of certain acts or things done in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating, the historical change and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975*

WHEREAS it is expedient to restrict the taking of any legal or other proceedings in respect of certain acts or things done in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or steps necessitating, the historical change and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of 15th August, 1975;

AND WHEREAS Parliament is not in session and the President is satisfied that circumstances exist which render immediate action necessary,

(2705)

2706 THE BANGLADESH GAZETTE, EXTRA., SEPTEMBER 26, 1975

NOW, THEREFORE, in pursuance of the Proclamation of the 26th August 1975, and in exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of article 93 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the President is pleased to make and promulgate the following Ordinance

1. **SHORT TITLE.**— This Ordinance may be called the Indemnity Ordinance, 1975.

2. **RESTRICTIONS ON THE TAKING OF ANY LEGAL OR OTHER PROCEEDINGS AGAINST PERSONS IN RESPECT OF CERTAIN ACTS AND THINGS.**— (1) Notwithstanding anything contained in any law, including a law relating to any defence service, for the time being in force, no suit, prosecution or other proceedings, legal or disciplinary, shall be, or be taken, in, before or by any Court, including the Supreme Court and Court Martial or other authority against any person, including a person who is or has, at any time, been subject to any law relating to any defence service, for or on account of or in respect of any act, matter or thing done or step taken by such person in connection with, or in preparation of execution of any plan for, or as necessary step towards the change of Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975.

(2) For the purposes of this section, a certificate by the President, or a person authorised by him in this behalf, that any act, matter or thing was done or step taken by any person mentioned in the certificate in connection with or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or as necessary step towards, the change of Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Proclamation of Martial Law on the morning of the 15th August, 1975, shall be sufficient evidence of such act, matter or thing having been done or step having been taken in connection with, or in preparation or execution of any plan for, or as necessary step towards, the change of such Government and the Proclamation of Martial Law on that morning.

**KHANDAKER MOSITTAQUEU AHMED**  
President

DACCA;  
The 26th September, 1975.

**M H RAIHAN**  
Secretary.

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# **POST-MORTEM REPORT ON THE DEAD BODY OF THE LATE PRESIDENT ZIAUR RAHMAN**

**Post-Mortem Report in respect of Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Ziaur Rahman, BU, psc., President of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.**

*Body Identified by*—Lt. Col. Mahfuz, P.S. to President.

*Time of Death*—04.00 hrs. on 30-5-81.

*Time of Post-mortem Examination*—10.00 hrs. on 01-6-81.

**Brief History**—The President was allegedly assassinated by the miscreants on Saturday the 30th May, 1981 at 04.00 hrs. in Chittagong Circuit House. He sustained multiple bullet injuries on his person and died on the spot. It is stated by Lt. Col. Mahfuz that his body was buried with another two dead bodies at about 14.30 hrs. on 30th May 1981 near Chittagong Engineering College. Lt. Col. Mahfuz with others of the Sta. HQ. Ctg. exhumed his body from that mass grave on 01-6-1981 morning and brought to CMH Ctg. Cantt. for necessary P.M. examination at about 10.00 hrs. on 01-6-1981.

**On Examination**—The body was partially decomposed but the configuration was intact to be identified as the body of the late President Ziaur Rahman. There were about twenty separate bullet wounds on the body. The details of the wounds are as follows:—

- a. One bullet entered through right eye and was out through the left occiputo-parietal region with the extrusion of the brain matter.
- b. Another 8"x3" oblique lacerated wound present extending from the left angle of the mouth up to the left lower neck. The mandible was shattered and all the neck structures

c. There are about ten bullet wounds over the chest and abdomen probably entrance wounds.

d. There were equal number of corresponding bigger wounds on the back of the trunk also. These were probably exit wounds.

e. There was big lacerated 4"x3" wound on the perineum and left groin with corresponding wounds of the back of penis and buttock left. Probably due to the effects of brush fire.

f. There were two bullet wounds in the rt. arm.

g. There were few scattered small wounds on both lower limbs.

The body was cleaned and reconstructed. Formalin Solution was injected in all the wounds and the body was soaked by the same. The whole body was then bandaged with soft cotton wool and wrapped in new white sheet. Cedar wood oil, Eucalyptus oil and "Aar" were sprinkled over the whole sheet. Then the body was preserved in a coffin by tea leaves. The coffin was wrapped by the National Standard and handed over to Brig. A.K.M. Azizul Islam, Lt. Col. Mahfuz and Lt. Col. Mahabul Islam at 13.00 hrs. by CO, CMH, Chittagong.

Sd/- Lt. Col. A. Z. TUFAIL AHMED  
*Gd. Specialist in Pathology.*

POST MORTEM REPORT: MAJ. GEN. M.A. MANZOOR

Body identified by Lt. Col. Shamsur Rahman of EBRG.

Reported time of death: 23.30 hours on 1st June, 1981.

Time of post mortem: 07.30 hours on 2nd June, 1981.

History: Dead body of Major General M.A. Manzoor was brought to CMH Chittagong at about 04.00 hours on 2nd June. No history available.

External Examination: Rigour Mortis had set in. There was a big gaping hole 4"x 2" with ragged margin on the right occipital region. The bullet crushed the bone and shattered it completely. A big chunk of bone was blown away and the brain matter extruded through the gap. There was no other injury on the body. No internal examination was carried out because the cause of death was obvious.

Cause of death: Shock and haemorrhage from bullet injury, head.

Signed: Lt. Col. A.Z. Tufail Ahmed

Dated: 2nd June 1981.

Copy

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Ministry of Defence  
Old High Court Building

BY ZA

NOTIFICATION

No 7/3/D-I/75-160.

Dated, the 28 February 1979.

BA-69 Major General Ziaur Rahman, BU, psc is promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General with immediate effect.

By order of the President,

Sd/ xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
( A H F K Sadique )  
Defence Secretary

No 7/3/D-I/75-160

Dated the 28th February 1979.

Copy forwarded for information and necessary action to :-

1. Chief of the Army Staff, Bangladesh Army, Army Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka
2. Chief of the Naval Staff, Bangladesh Navy, Naval Headquarters, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka
3. Chief of the Air Staff, Bangladesh Air Force, Air Headquarters Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.
4. P. S. O. to the Commander -in- Chief, C-in-C's Secretariat, Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.

Sd/ xx x x xx  
( J A Hena )  
Joint Secretary

# The Bangladesh Gazette

Published by Authority

THURSDAY, APRIL 19, 1979

## PART III

Notifications issued by the Ministry of Defence other than those included in Part I.

### MINISTRY OF DEFENCE NOTIFICATIONS

Dacca, the 9th April 1979.

No. 7/8/D-I/75/270.—BA-69 Major General Ziaur Rahman, EU, psc is promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant General with effect from 28th April 1978.

2. This cancels this Ministry's Notification No. 7/8/D-I/75/160, dated 28th February 1979.

No. 7/8/D-I/75/271.—BA-69 Temporary Lieutenant General Ziaur Rahman, BU, psc is retired from the service of the Bangladesh Army with effect from 29th April 1978.

By order of the President  
A. H. F. K. SADIQUE  
Defence Secretary.

#### প্রজ্ঞাপনসমূহ

ঢাকা, ৬ই এপ্রিল ১৯৭৯।

সং ৭/৮-ডি/৭৫/২৭০—বিঃসংখ্যা ৬৯—বাংলাদেশ সশস্ত্র বাহিনীতে নিম্নোক্ত বিঃসংখ্যা ৬৯—২৭০ নং প্রজ্ঞাপন প্রকাশিত হইতেছে।

১। উপরোক্ত প্রজ্ঞাপন ২৮শে এপ্রিল ১৯৭৮ তারিখ হইতে প্রযোজ্য (এস এ ডি) এবং সেনাবাহিনীতে প্রযোজ্য (এস এ এম) করা হইবে।

ঢাকা, ৭ই এপ্রিল ১৯৭৯।

সং ৭/৮-ডি/৭৫/২৭১—বাংলাদেশ সশস্ত্র বাহিনীতে নিম্নোক্ত বিঃসংখ্যা ৬৯—২৭১ নং প্রজ্ঞাপন প্রকাশিত হইতেছে।

| ক্রমিক<br>সং. | নাম।              | কর্মসম্পন্ন তারিখ। | কোষ।            |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| ১।            | সং: ৭/৮-ডি/৭৫/২৭১ | ১৯৭৮-১৯৭৯          | আর ডি এম এম সি। |
| ক্রমিক<br>সং. | নাম।              | কর্মসম্পন্ন তারিখ। | কোষ।            |
| ২।            | সং: ৭/৮-ডি/৭৫/২৭১ | ১৯৭৮-১৯৭৯          | আর ডি এম এম সি। |

রাষ্ট্রপতির আদেশক্রমে

সং: ৭/৮-ডি/৭৫/২৭১

সিনিয়র সেক্রেটারী

By the end of October Moshtaque, Osmani, General Khalil and Farook and Rashid were convinced that a coup was imminent. General Khalil said that according to the reports they were receiving the finger of suspicion pointed equally at Khalid Musharraf and General Zia. 'We used to meet every night to try to find out who was the more dangerous,' Khalil told me. 'At first the boys (Farook and Rashid) wanted to arrest both of them. Then they suggested we quickly form a brigade that was loyal to us and get everybody arrested. But that too was discarded as not being feasible.'

Whatever the reason, General Osmani apparently was convinced that General Zia presented the greater danger. On the night of 2nd November, accompanied by General Khalil, Osmani informed Moshtaque that Zia must be removed from his job as Chief of the Army Staff. Rashid, who was present on the occasion, gave me an interesting account of the incident. The cabinet sub-committee had been convened on the evening of 2nd November to finalise the arrangements for restoring the Constitution and political rights. After a lengthy discussion the meeting broke up a little before midnight, leaving the Law Minister, Manoranjan Dhar, the task of drafting the required legislation. Osmani had attended the meeting. Before going home to the Cantonment he had got hold of General Khalil and went in for a chat with the President. Rashid joined them. The nub of the discussion was that Osmani had serious misgivings about General Zia and wanted him removed from his job. Rashid objected strongly. He said it was not Zia, but some other senior officers such as Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil who were the real threat to the government. And in couching his argument, Rashid said he took pains to slyly convey a warning to Moshtaque that Osmani may have a deeper motive for wanting Zia out. Moshtaque was quick to grasp the point. Though he had never been happy with General Zia, this was a new situation and he was not going to throw his hand away so easily. Furthermore, there was the possibility that what the new man Osmani had in mind was even less acceptable to him than Zia. So Moshtaque temporised. He told Osmani: 'Alright, if you want to change General Zia tell me who is to replace him? Give me some names.' Osmani promised to do the needful the following day. The two generals then bid them goodnight and left Bangababan for their homes.

Rashid recalls sitting for more than half an hour with Moshtaque in the President's private quarters chewing over the bombshell that Osmani had dropped. It's symptomatic of the miasma of suspicion and intrigue that permeated Bangladesh at that time that the two of them began to suspect that, of all persons, the grand old soldier, General Osmani, may be working hand-in-glove with Khalid Musharraf's group. 'We decided to wait and see whether he would recommend Khalid as General Zia's replacement,' Rashid said. 'If he did, then we would have been sure he was doing some mischief.'

Rashid was returning to his own bedroom further down the corridor when a very agitated police officer ran up to tell him breathlessly in staccato bursts: 'Sir ... those infantry men ... those who were guarding ... they have run away. They said ... we must go also as there's to be trouble ... serious fighting. They said we must run away.'

Rashid's worst fears had materialised. The counter-coup had begun.

#### Notes

1. The Sunday Telegraph, 25.8.1975
2. ibid.

## IX

# 'Counter coup' and the Jail Killings

*In the middle of the confusion, the telephone rang. When I picked it up I heard a man say: I'm DIG Prisons. I would like to talk to Hon'ble President.*

—Major Abdur Rashid

Bangababan, the President's House in Dhaka, is not built to withstand a siege. The splendid colonial-style building with wide carriage-ways and acre upon acre of tropical flowers and foliage—the colours somehow always seem more vivid in Bengal—has an old-world charm about it, quite removed from the pressures of everyday. It belongs to another world; a world of pomp and circumstance, of unhurried movement, a world of orderliness. Yet on that fateful night of 2nd November, 1975, Bangababan looked like a military camp gearing to beat off an invader.

The roar of tanks starting up had startled hundreds of crows roosting in the trees and they flew about cawing wildly in the night. But within moments even their raucous noises were drowned out as the rest of the tanks sprang to life. Farook had eight tanks in Bangababan. He had another eight at Suhrawardy Udhyan, the old racecourse ground, conveniently placed to control the radio station and intercept anything coming from the Cantonment and the old airport. Twelve other tanks awaited his orders in the Bengal Lancers' lines in the Cantonment itself.

Farook had been sleeping in an adjoining bedroom when Rashid awakened him to break the news of the defection of the infantry guard, the 1st East Bengal Regiment. The two of them had a hurried conference with Khandaker Moshtaque. Farook wanted to implement immediately a plan he had prepared for such an eventuality. It involved seizing Dhaka Airport (the old one), the 46th Brigade Headquarters and other key army installations. How he hoped to do this with tanks alone—and without the necessary infantry back-up—Farook did not explain. But he did say that Moshtaque and Rashid reacted sharply to this 'hot-headed' scheme. They told him they would rather try to talk their way out of the crisis than provoke a civil war. So Farook undertook an alternative plan, a defensive one. He ordered the tanks in all three locations to start and take up previously designed defensive positions. In Bangababan this meant some of the tanks moving outside the walls to control the approach roads. Others stayed within the compound like enormous growling mastiffs waiting to savage any intruder. Men with machine guns and sten guns took up positions on the long perimeter wall.

Before leaving for Suhrawardy Udhyan to take personal command of the tanks there, Farook made one telephone call. It was to a friend, an army officer overseeing the government's telecommunications system. Farook re-

quested a total communications black-out with the outside world. It is not known whether this officer did indeed oblige Farook or instead choose to look the other way, as Rashid found so many other officers doing at that crucial moment for the Majors and Moshtaque.

Sitting in the President's office with Khandaker Moshtaque, Rashid had been burning up the telephone with calls for help. First he phoned General Zia, Chief of the Army Staff, and found him asleep. He briefed the general about the developments and requested his presence in Bangababan. 'I'll look into it,' was Zia's brusque non-committal reply. Then, to the major's chagrin, Zia abruptly hung up.

Rashid telephoned Brigadier Khalid Musharraf, Chief of the General Staff. 'Sir, what's happening?' Rashid asked. 'You tell me,' said the Brigadier. Rashid briefly told him about the infantry withdrawing from the President's House. Then he asked: 'What do you think?' 'What's there to think,' Khalid retorted. 'What was expected earlier has started. I'm going out now. You wait there. I'll call you back later.'

Rashid's third call was to the headquarters of the Bangladesh Rifles. But he got no joy from them. Then he telephoned Air Vice Marshal Towab, the Chief of the Air Staff who was billeted in the VIP rest house next to Hotel Dhaka Sheraton. Towab owed his appointment to Rashid. Two months earlier the major had flown all the way to Munich with a letter from General Osmani to offer him the job. So Rashid was counting on a positive response at least from this Air Force officer. Once again he was disappointed. According to Rashid, Towab didn't think there was any point in rushing to Bangababan. He felt he would be of little use there. Towab said he would, instead, see what he could do about getting help from some Air Force personnel. Rashid got the message: Towab would not be coming. 'Perhaps he didn't think he should risk his life,' the major added wryly.

Rashid, in desperation, then telephoned General Osmani at his Cantonment residence. After explaining what had happened, Rashid told him that the President would like to have his Defence Adviser with him in Bangababan as soon as possible. Osmani readily agreed to come. But he did not have a car. Looking out of the window he also noticed a lot of troops moving about. Osmani wasn't sure it was safe to venture out. But the old general did try to help. While waiting for a lift, he telephoned an order to the Bangladesh Rifles to send two battalions to guard the President. Apparently these instructions were aborted somewhere down the line because no BDR units turned up at Bangababan.

Osmani also telephoned General Zia. 'His wife picked up the telephone,' he told me, 'and said Zia can't come to the telephone... there's some difficulty. When I insisted on talking to him, she told me in a hushed sort of voice that there were some men in the hall with him and he couldn't come to the phone. I realised then that Zia was under some sort of restraint,' Osmani added.

Calling Khalid Musharraf's house a little later Osmani was informed that the CGS was 'in the lines' i.e. with the 4th East Bengal. He telephoned him there. When the brigadier came on the line, Osmani recalled, they had a brief but sharp exchange that indicated that by this time Khalid Musharraf had taken charge of the operation.

Osmani: 'Khalid, what the hell's going on?'

Khalid: 'The tanks are adopting threatening postures.'

Osmani: 'What threatening postures? You pull back your infantry and I assure you the tanks won't do anything.'

Khalid: 'Don't worry. I'll sort it out.'

Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil had been waiting a long time to sort out the majors in Bangababan. In fact on the day Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed, Khalid had personally contacted Shafat Jamil, the 46th Brigade (Dhaka Brigade) commander, to 'prepare for action against the mutineers'. The troops had accordingly been prepared to strike at midnight, but the action was never carried out because Khalid was called to Bangababan and did not contact Jamil again till three days later. The CGS then told him: 'We want no further bloodshed. Stand down your troops.'

Shafat Jamil had never accepted this situation. From time to time he went to General Zia, who had been promoted to Chief of Army Staff in place of General Shafiqullah, complaining: 'The majors are ruining the country. Let's re-establish the chain of command. If you allow me, I'll sort them out.'

'Zia never shut me up or gave me orders,' Jamil recalled. 'He was playing both sides.'

However in the middle of October, General Zia suddenly ordered the Bengal Lancers to return to the Cantonment, leaving only four tanks in Bangababan. The order was not carried out and rescinded next day when the majors intervened. Farook and Rashid had asserted their supremacy again.

On 25th October, General Zia summoned Shafat Jamil to his office in Army Headquarters. The brigadier found Air Vice Marshal Towab closeted with Zia. When Jamil entered and exchanged courtesies with his Chief, General Zia got up and went to the toilet leaving Jamil alone with Towab for more than 10 minutes. They sat in silence because Jamil did not like Towab since he was connected with the majors. When Zia returned, without further ado, he told Jamil to go back to his headquarters, leaving the brigadier perplexed about the reason for being summoned in the first place. Then he realised that Zia had wanted to give them an opportunity to speak.

Towab confirmed the incident in his own way. He told me he had been getting reports of an imminent coup and indications were that General Zia was behind it. So to test him out Towab had gone to Zia to say: 'General, I've been hearing things and I want you to know that if you are planning anything, please note that I am fully behind you.' Zia was not at all taken in by Towab. He never trusted the Air Force Chief and he correctly assumed that it was more than possible that Towab was trying to trap him. Zia strongly denied he was plotting. But he cunningly put Towab and Shafat Jamil together. This could have been either to compromise Towab since Jamil's opposition was well known, or to quietly promote their intrigue from which he could benefit. In any case the effort failed.

On the 1st November Khalid Musharraf asked Shafat Jamil: 'Are you still keen to streamline the chain of command?' Jamil replied in the affirmative. Then Khalid told him: 'Things have gone beyond the limit. We must strike now.' A secret meeting was arranged for that afternoon in a Chinese restaurant near Dhaka Stadium. Khalid and Jamil were joined there by two trusted junior officers when they discussed the plan of action. The juniors suggested that General Zia should be killed as part of the coup. But this was vetoed by Khalid because he did not want any bloodshed. The decision was taken to strike the next day at Bangababan to take out the majors and their tanks and to seize control of the government. They would simultaneously arrest Zia and forcibly retire him. After that the conspirators were confident they would not have trouble from any of the other officers.

Accordingly on the evening of 2nd November, Shafat Jamil ordered Major Iqbal, company commander of 1st East Bengal regiment guarding Bangababan with about 300 infantry men, to withdraw his troops to the Cantonment after

midnight and to keep the move secret. Major Iqbal complied. He had the troops back in the barracks by 1 am on the morning of the 3rd November. That was the start of the counter-coup. A detail under Capt. Hafizullah of the 1st East Bengal was sent to detain and isolate General Zia in his residence. Hafizullah stormed into Zia's house. Zia, who had been awakened earlier by Rashid's telephone call, asked the young officer: 'What are you doing, Hafiz?' The captain, nervously pointing his gun at the general, told him, 'Sir, You are under arrest. Please don't do anything.' Hafizullah detained Zia in the living room with an armed guard. But in attempting to isolate Zia by ripping out the telephone in that room, Captain Hafizullah didn't realise that it was only an extension of the one in Zia's bedroom. It was on the bedroom telephone that Begum Zia received her calls from General Osmani and Major Rashid.

By 3 am, General Osmani said, 'I was getting reports from all over that the infantry had taken over the airport, parts of the city and the radio transmitter on the outskirts of Dhaka. Tanks were confronting the infantry. A civil war situation had developed.'

In Bangababan, Major Rashid was anxiously awaiting some word from General Zia. It was more than an hour since they had spoken and the situation had deteriorated rapidly. He called Zia's home a second time. Begum Zia said her husband was being held captive in the living room. She was evidently crying and quite overcome with anxiety for her husband's safety. Rashid tried to reassure her. 'Don't worry. If they haven't done anything to him so far it's not likely they intend to harm him. But pray to God. Only He can help us now.'

Indeed, God was now their only recourse. Man had failed the majors. The fantasy world of power, pretention and politics they had built up since August on the dead bodies of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's family, was now crashing all around them. Rashid didn't blame himself or Farook for their tragic miscalculation. Instead he put the blame on Zia, silently cursing his hesitancy, his refusal to act against those who had been conspiring against them, and even more, Zia's inability to trust them or anyone at all. Rashid was still very bitter a year later when he recounted the incident in an interview. 'He (Zia) was a cowardly man who couldn't be trusted and couldn't trust anyone,' he said. But that night as he sat silently cursing the general, Rashid's reverie was interrupted by a call from Khalid Musharraf.

Khalid: 'We are in action now, so why don't you come and make a compromise?'

Rashid: 'What compromise?'

Khalid: 'Come and join me. You have nothing to fear.'

Rashid: 'So far as I'm concerned, I trust only once . . . I may make mistakes, but I don't change and I don't compromise especially in such circumstances.'

Khalid: 'We are coming for the counter . . . I will see you till the end.'

Rashid: 'If you have started the action, it's your luck. I will also see you till the end.'

The two officers traded verbal abuse and insult for several minutes before Khalid Musharraf hung up. Bangladesh may have been on the brink of civil war but for the moment at least the battles were being fought by telephone.

By that time Bangababan was very tense and ablaze with activity as the Bengal Lancers prepared to meet the impending assault. They could see elements of Shafat Jamil's 46th Brigade infantrymen coming towards them in the first glimmer of light before dawn. Yet the foot soldiers always kept a safe distance from the tanks which every now and then made quick, menacing movements and swung their guns about.

The President's office reflected the frenetic atmosphere outside. Telephones rang. Orders were shouted. Men dashed in and out with messages. Rashid himself kept making quick sorties outside the main building to keep an eye on the troops. Then some time after 4 am, as he recalled in a tape-recorded interview, 'In the middle of the confusion the telephone rang. When I picked it up I heard a man say: "I'm the DIG Prisons speaking. I would like to talk to honorable President"'.

Rashid handed the telephone to Moshtaque.

Rashid continued: 'The President listened for some time to what the man was saying. Then he spoke quietly and listened some more. Then I heard him say, "Yes... Yes... Yes..." several times. I couldn't make out exactly what he meant, but it seemed he was giving some sort of OK.'

Rashid was only telling part of the truth. It will be recalled that Majors Farook Rahman and Abdur Rashid, two months earlier, had formulated a diabolical 'contingency plan' which, in the event of Moshtaque's assassination or a 'counter-coup' would pre-empt the restoration of an Awami League government by killing the four top party leaders who had been detained in jail. The plan had been expressly designed to be self-executing. Now, in the early hours of 3rd November, the 'contingency plan' had, indeed, been automatically activated at the first real sign of trouble for Moshtaque's government.

When Khalid's 'counter-coup' got under-way, the previously designated 'combat team' led by Naik Risaldar Muslehuddin went straight to Dhaka Central Jail and demanded admission. Seeing the armed men in uniform the jailor refused. An argument developed and the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Prisons—i.e. the head of the Dhaka Central Jail—was brought from his quarters to deal with the matter. What transpired next has been well-documented in a series of depositions and tape recordings made by the jail authorities when, on the orders of Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil, Brigadier Aminul Huq, a senior army officer, interviewed them on the evening of the 4th November, 1975.

According to these records, Muslehuddin and his men said they had been sent by Rashid and Farook and demanded that Tajuddin, Syed Nazrul Islam, Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman be handed over to them. On hearing this the DIG prisons got very scared but nevertheless refused to comply because it was against prison regulations. Muslehuddin then insisted on telephoning Rashid in Bangababan and was allowed to do so. In the course of the call Rashid ordered the DIG prisons to do whatever Muslehuddin told him. Despite these instructions, the DIG was reluctant to comply. After consulting his superiors, the officer then telephoned Bangababan to obtain clarification and instructions from President Moshtaque himself. Moshtaque verified Rashid's orders. Accordingly Muslehuddin and his gang were admitted to the jail proper and allowed to go to the cells.

Tajuddin and Nazrul Islam shared one cell; Mansoor Ali and Kamruzzaman an adjoining one. They were all brought together in Tajuddin's cell and killed by automatic fire from close range. Three of them died immediately. The fourth, Tajuddin, had bullet wounds in his abdomen and leg. He seems to have slowly bled to death. Horrified prisoners in adjacent cells later told the family that they could hear him moaning and calling out for water from the cell that Muslehuddin and his gang had locked shut before leaving.

The savage slaying of these hapless men is an act of infamy on par with the massacre of the Bengali intellectuals by the departing Pakistani troops on the eve of Bangladesh's independence in December, 1971. Yet, whereas the Bangladeshi martyrs are revered and mourned nationally each year on their death

anniversary, the Jail Four remain a national embarrassment, unmourned and unremembered except in private by a selected few.

There is much confusion about the jail killings—who did it? How? and Why? The conventional wisdom has it that they were bayoneted to death. Clearly this is untrue for the official record shows they were killed at close range by automatic fire. This was verified by the families. It has also been advanced by a number of writers that somehow from their jail cells Tajuddin and his companions managed to plot and plan with Khalid Musharraf and his men to launch the 3rd November coup. The jail conditions and the extreme hostility of their environment made this impossible. Also the writers clearly are not aware of the 'contingency plan' hatched by Moshtaque, Rashid and Farook two months earlier to kill the Jail Four.

Lifschultz in 'The Unfinished Revolution' quotes the Reuters correspondent in Dhaka, Atiqul Alam, about possessing a hand-written letter from Tajuddin to the Indian High Commissioner Samar Sen concerning 'coup plans and preparations'. Alam has stoutly denied he had any such 'letter' and no one else has heard of it. While I am prepared to accept that Atiqul Alam may have told a different story to Lifschultz and others, he is in the circumstances hardly a credible witness since he was jailed for 'collaboration' by the Awami League government in 1972 and only released six months later when he cited a list of senior officials who were gravely embarrassed to be called upon to give evidence on his behalf at his trial.

Zillur R. Khan, the noted academician, in his book, 'Leadership Crisis in Bangladesh', also makes the statement (page 151) that 'the most damaging evidence supporting the contention that the coup (led by Khalid Musharraf) was originally pro-Mujib was the FACT that the four closest associates of Mujib, who were languishing in jail, knew about the coup and were preparing to come out as heroes.' This is an astonishing assertion. The real FACTS based on jail and government records, backed up by the testimony of independent witnesses, some of Khalid's chums and the Tajuddin family, gave a contrary picture.

Tajuddin was arrested on 22nd August, 1975, and his family was kept under house detention for several weeks thereafter. He was not allowed any visitors till 15th October when his wife was permitted to see him for half an hour in the presence of five officers of the jail and intelligence services. The second and final visit granted Tajuddin was on 1st November, just 36 hours before he was killed. Mrs. Tajuddin was allowed to see him for less than 20 minutes in the presence of four men, some of whom were military officers in civies. She recalled that Tajuddin was in a 'very depressed mood'. He had been keeping a diary and that day had hoped to fill in the last of the 560 pages. Mrs. Tajuddin said her husband also had a premonition of death. 'The situation,' he told her at that last meeting, 'seems to be very bad and I don't think we will be allowed to leave this place alive.'

Apart from these two visits, Tajuddin had no communication at all with the outside world. An official who saw him at that time confirmed that he had been very gloomy before the end and certainly was not expecting to come out of jail a hero.

All this could have been cleared up by a proper inquiry.

A Judicial Commission consisting of three Supreme Court judges was in fact appointed in November, 1975, to inquire into these jail killings. For reasons yet unexplained, General Zia, during the five and a half years he ruled in Bangladesh, did not allow the Commission to function or fulfill its purpose. The Commission thus quietly withered on the vine. That episode will always

shame General Zia's memory. It did not matter that some of the Jail Four were corrupt or brutal or that they all once belonged to the team that tore the heart out of the Bangladeshis. What did matter is the fact that a most horrible crime was committed and that once again the sequence of crime and punishment was broken—principally by official connivance; to a lesser degree by public silence. For that reason we are all diminished. And Bangladesh continues to wallow in its legacy of blood.

The situation began to hot up as dawn broke on the morning of 3rd November. Two MiGs of the Bangladesh Air Force made threatening passes over Bangababan, forcing Khandaker Moshtaque to temporarily hide in the basement air raid shelter. Then a tank commander reported that one of the Air Force's ageing Russian-built helicopters was flying in tight circles over the tanks in the compound. 'I've got it in my sights. It's a sitting duck,' he radioed excitedly. 'Request permission to bring it down.'

General Osmani sternly ordered him to hold his fire. The general had reached the President's house just in time after hitch-hiking all the way from the Cantonment. He wasn't going to be the first to start the shooting—and a civil war. A few minutes later a small delegation from the Cantonment turned up at the gates with a list of demands from Brigadier Khalid Musharraf. There were two colonels, another officer and ex-Majors Dalim and Noor. Apparently at the first sign of trouble that morning these two men from the group that killed Mujib had rushed off to the Cantonment and were now involved with Khalid in negotiating Farook and Rashid's surrender!

Khalid's demands were, first, that the tanks must be disarmed and returned to the Cantonment. Second, a new Chief of Army Staff must be appointed to replace General Zia. Third, Moshtaque could stay on as President, but there must be a change in foreign policy to make Bangladesh more closely aligned with the countries that had proved to be its friends in the past. Curiously omitted was the first thing that Khalid Musharraf had been trying to obtain on the telephone all night, i.e. Farook and Rashid's surrender. Perhaps the Brigadier expected that it would follow the disarming of the tanks. But no one was assuming anything at that time. Moshtaque himself refused to countenance the demands. Instead he told the officers that they should inform the CGS that he, Moshtaque, would 'cease to be President at 0600 hours' that morning.

Moshtaque's sudden decision to resign has not been explained. But if it was intended as an act of brinkmanship, it failed to work. The officers returned two hours later with another message. This time Khalid Musharraf demanded only two things: the tanks must be disarmed and returned to the Cantonment and a new Chief of Army Staff must be appointed. He did not volunteer for the job. He didn't have to. Neither Khandaker Moshtaque nor General Osmani or Major Rashid had any doubt whatsoever about Khalid's intentions.

What transpired next would have been more appropriate in a Bengali stage farce.

Moshtaque told the officers he could not accept the demands because he had ceased to be President after the 0600 hours deadline. When they turned to General Osmani, he told them that since Khandaker Moshtaque had ceased to be President, he himself had no authority to do anything as he had also automatically ceased to be the President's Defence Adviser. 'Go to hell and do what you damn well want,' Osmani stormed, his moustache bristling and once more the Papa Tiger.

Non-plussed by the turn of events, the young officers kept pleading alter-

nately with the two men. Then Dalim turned to Osmani: 'Tell them to surrender,' he shouted. 'I know why Ayub Khan called you an old mule. But don't you be stubborn now.' Moshtaque got the excited major to simmer down. The negotiations dragged on for another three hours. The officers shuttled between Bangababan and the Cantonment and there were exchanges of defiance on both sides. And every now and then Khalid and Rashid traded insult and invective on the telephone.

At around 10 am there was another telephone call to Bangababan, one which would have a profound effect on the decision of the majors and Moshtaque to capitulate to the forces led by Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil. The event was described to me by Major General Khalilur Rahman, Chief of the Defence Staff, who was in Bangababan at that time.

General Khalil said: 'Nurul Islam, the Inspector General of Police, who was a close friend of mine, telephoned to give me the news of the killing of Tajuddin and the others in the jail during the night, I was horrified by the news and immediately went over to Chashi (Mahboobul Alam Chashi, Secretary to the President) to tell him so that he could inform Moshtaque. Chashi immediately got up and went to the President's room. He came back within a minute to say in an awed voice: "He knows!"'

General Khalil said the realisation that Moshtaque was involved in the jail killings so horrified him that he decided from then on that he would do nothing to protect him or the majors. But, for reasons yet unexplained, the general did not tell another soul about the killings that day. (For this reason Brigadier Shafat Jamil would 36 hours later try to arrest him, claiming his silence had allowed the killer majors to escape.) Moshtaque and evidently Rashid, who was constantly in Moshtaque's room that morning, were not to know of General Khalil's decision to remain silent. All they knew was that the grisly secret was out and that they were now extremely vulnerable to an angry public reaction which would surely come when the news percolated into the city. Their attitudes thereafter showed a remarkable change. The effort now was not to fight but to extricate themselves from the mess as quickly as possible.

Till then Rashid had been putting on a bold front, telling those around him that they 'would fight it out to the death'. Now he began to talk about a 'standoff' and their reluctance to 'precipitate a civil war'. For his part Moshtaque, with Rashid's approval, requested the other side to allow the two majors to leave the country safely with their families. The only one not party to these goings on at that time was Farook, sitting with his tanks at Suhrawardy Udhyana. Farook was itching for a fight. But the signal from Rashid in Bangababan never came.

Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil agreed to Moshtaque's request that the majors be allowed to leave the country. It was then left to Air Vice Marshal Towab and the Bangladesh Foreign Office to work out the modalities of their safe conduct to Bangkok along with those who elected to go with them.

At one stage Moshtaque himself insisted on going into exile with the majors. (Brigadier Manzoor would tell me a month later that it was 'an attempt to get out of the country while the going was good'.) But Khalid Musharraf would not hear of it. Eventually 17 members of the group immediately involved in the killing of Sheikh Mujib—including Dalim, Noor, Huda, Pasha and Shariar—went into exile with Farook and Rashid.

The departure was marked by emotional scenes in Bangababan. Some of the Bengal Lancers and artillery men wept openly. 'Don't leave us or we will be killed,' they wailed. Farook tried to reassure them with the promise that



they would not be victimised. But the apprehensions remained. This would be a major factor in the Sepoy Mutiny four days later.

As Farook was waiting in the airport terminal building to board the Fokker aircraft that would be taking them to Bangkok, the 'azan' (call) for Magreb or evening prayers rang in his ears. He looked at his watch, noting the time, the date and the day. Then he smiled ruefully to himself. The 3rd of November was a MONDAY—not his lucky day! And Friday's Child was tasting his first defeat.

After the departure of the majors there was an angry argument in Bangababan about what should be done next. Moshtaque wanted no further part in the proceedings, saying he had resigned and was going home to his private residence. Khalid Musharraf wanted him to continue as President, perhaps hoping he could use him to advantage. The argument continued. Ultimately Moshtaque agreed to remain on two conditions. The first was that the Army pledge allegiance to him and promise to obey his orders. The second was that the Cabinet be allowed to meet formally to express support and confidence in him. Khalid wasn't very happy about these conditions. He countered with the demand that he be appointed Chief of Army Staff in place of General Zia. This demand, according to General Osmani, was actively supported by Air Vice Marshal Towab and Commodore M. H. Khan, the Chief of Naval Staff. The evidence is that these two officers, who were heading their respective services, blithely abandoned General Zia in favour of Khalid Musharraf when he appeared to be leading the winning side. Two days later, they would, like glorified batmen, pin the general's Star and Ribbon on Khalid Musharraf's uniform. The picture of that happy event—Towab and Musharraf wore big smiles—was splashed across five columns at the top of the front page of the Bangladesh Observer. Then two days later, when Khalid had been killed in the Sepoy Mutiny, Towab and Commodore Khan switched sides again to back General Zia. No wonder the sepoys and the navy and air force rankers had such utter contempt for their officers at that time.

For the moment, however, there was no hint of all this. General Osmani told me Khandaker Moshtaque and Khalid Musharraf had a big argument in Bangababan after the majors left for Bangkok. Moshtaque appeared to be playing for time—what exactly for, no one explains. But at about 11 pm he finally got Khalid and his men to disperse and meet again the following day (4th November). It was very late, Moshtaque explained. They were all very tired and, in any case, nothing could be done without the approval of the Cabinet.

'We had a little food,' Osmani recalled, 'the first in more than 20 hours. Then we went to sleep that night wondering what new trauma the day would bring.'

When he turned up at about 10 am on Tuesday, Khalid Musharraf was accompanied by Major General Khalil, Towab and Commodore Khan. They brought with them the first shock of the day. It was General Zia's resignation. It was a short letter, Osmani recalled. Zia said he was resigning because he did not want to become involved in politics. And he asked for full pension and the normal gratuity and benefits an officer gets when he retires. Osmani remembered this last request with some derision. 'How could he, a General and Chief of Army Staff at that, go down so placidly clutching on to his pension rights?' Osmani asked.

Whatever Osmani's opinion of him, Zia was a survivor. The resignation clearly had been obtained under duress because he was still being held prisoner in his own home. And if Zia was anxious about the future it was because he

would have to live on his pension alone. Unlike some of the others he had not made money on the side. Indeed, after resigning Zia asked one of his junior officers to find him a small house with a monthly rent of about 300 Takkas. 'But Sir,' the embarrassed officer replied, 'you can't find a place even in Mohammadpur (a Dhaka suburb) for less than 800 Takkas.'

General Zia's resignation had cleared the way for Khalid, the coup leader, to become Chief of Army Staff. Accordingly at his insistence Moshtaque summoned the Cabinet to meet after evening prayers that day to consider the appointment and also to formalise his own position as President. Osmani told Khalid, Towab, Commodore Khan and General Khalil to be on hand in Bangababan when the Cabinet met. They were about to disperse when Air Commodore Islam, Director of Forces Intelligence, hurried in with the report about the massacre of Tajuddin and his companions in jail. Islam made no secret of the affair, babbling at the top of his voice. Now finally, 30 hours after the event and long after the majors and their men had left the country, the tragic news was at last made public.

'There was a terrible commotion,' General Osmani recalled. 'Some ministers who had come in were overcome with fear. Others were shouting. We were all taken aback. I felt sickened by the thought that we had once more lapsed into barbarism.'

Moshtaque, the consummate actor, was protesting as loudly as the others and as though he didn't know about it all along. He said the Cabinet must meet immediately to consider the situation. Accordingly an emergency meeting was called which even junior ministers were invited to attend. The 26 members of the government who quickly assembled in the Cabinet Room on the ground floor of Bangababan didn't take long to appoint a Judicial Commission to inquire into the jail killings. The Commission had three Supreme Court judges and was required to complete its findings 'expeditiously'. Then they all went on to a heated discussion about the 'counter-coup' and why Farook, Rashid and the rest of the group had been allowed to leave the country.

Khalid, General Khalil, Towab and Commodore Khan were brought in for questioning. They assured the government of their loyalty and promised to obey the President. But some of them were visibly annoyed when the ministers demurred about appointing Khalid Musharraf as the new Chief of Army Staff in place of General Zia. Moshtaque cunningly passed the buck to General Osmani. 'I can only act on the recommendation of my Defence Adviser,' he said. Osmani, taking the cue from Moshtaque, loudly announced that 'normal procedures' i.e. the selection process, would have to be followed to make the appointment and that would take some time. This did not please Khalid Musharraf and his friends. Angry exchanges followed.

Suddenly they were interrupted by a loud banging on the door. Col. Shafat Jamil, waving a stick and accompanied by five officers with sten guns, forced their way into the Cabinet Room. It caused consternation, with ministers fleeing in panic from their chairs. At one stage President Moshtaque was seen sprawled on the floor with a young major holding a sten gun at his head. General Osmani went to his rescue, pleading with the young officers: 'For God's sake don't do anything. This is madness. You will destroy the country.'

Shafat Jamil demanded Khandaker Moshtaque's resignation. 'You are a murderer,' he screamed at the President. 'You have killed the Father of the Nation. You have killed the four leaders in jail. You are a usurper. Your government is illegal. You have no right to stay in power. You must resign immediately.' Then turning on General Khalil, the Dhaka Brigade commander

accused him of hushing up the jail killings. 'You are under arrest,' he told him.

Recalling these events a month later, General Osmani told me: 'I kept telling myself, "My God, this is going to be another bloody massacre". Anything could have happened. If just one shot had been fired by accident it would have been the end of all of us.'

The commotion continued for a while. Every time the young officers surged forward pointing their guns at the ministers, Osmani kept pushing them back. Finally in desperation, Osmani told Moshtaque: 'It's getting too dangerous. You had better resign.' Moshtaque nodded his head in agreement. With that the moment of madness seemed to pass.

When the ministers had settled down once more, Shafat Jamil proposed that the Chief Justice should be made President in place of Moshtaque. One of the ministers (Osmani identified him as Manoranjan Dhar, the law minister; Shafat Jamil said it was Yusuf Ali) interrupted to say that that would not be the correct procedure. Legally, he added, the Speaker of the National Assembly should act as President if Moshtaque resigned. Whoever it was, Shafat Jamil turned on the man savagely: 'Damn him and damn you all,' he screamed. 'You changed the Constitution to justify one killing. So you can change it again. I tell you the Chief Justice will be President.'

That settled the matter. Having had their way the military officers allowed all but four of the ministers to leave Bangababan. The four—all Ministers of State—were Tahiruddin Thakur, Shah Moazzam Hussain, Nurul Islam Manzoor and K. M. Obaidur Rahman. They were told to write out their resignations. 'Are you going to arrest us?' Tahiruddin Thakur asked. No one bothered to answer him. But two of them, Thakur and Shah Moazzam Hussain, were indeed arrested soon afterwards and charged with corruption and the misuse of power. No one has explained why they were singled out for such treatment.

Osmani recalled there followed several hours of hectic activity in Bangababan as the officials prepared for the change of government. Khalid Musharraf also drafted several letters for Moshtaque to sign. One of them concerned his resignation as President. Another was to make Moshtaque responsible for the majors leaving the country along with their killer team. The third, according to Osmani, 'was something to do with the jail killings'. He would not say what exactly this was.

Osmani continued: 'Khalid kept insisting that Moshtaque sign the last two letters and pre-date them to the 3rd November. Moshtaque kept refusing. Things were getting out of hand again so I told him (Moshtaque) "You may sign if you have to and if there's a court case I'll come as a witness". Asked what he meant by that, Osmani replied: 'Oh, I would say he signed it under duress.'

It was 1.00 am on the 5th November when Chief Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem was finally brought to Bangababan. Seeing Osmani in the corridor the judge asked why he had been brought there. Osmani told him: 'You are to be President.' When the Chief Justice smartly declined the honour, Osmani advised him: 'For God's sake do it. You have to be President otherwise there will be no law and the country will be finished.'

Justice Sayem, however, still wanted no part of the arrangement. He turned around and went home, to be followed by Khalid, Shafat Jamil, Osmani, Khalil and the Air Force and Navy Chiefs. They finally persuaded him to accept the job. Thus on the 6th November, 1975, Justice Abusadat Sayem became Bangladesh's fifth President in the fourth year of the country's independence.

## X

# A Night to Remember

*Sephai, Sephai, Bhai Bhai  
Officer de Rakta Chai.*

*(All Sepoys are brothers  
We want the blood of officers).*

—Sepoy Mutiny slogan

For three days, the 3rd, 4th and 5th of November, 1975, Bangladesh was without a government. Khandaker Moshtaque Ahmed, the out-going President, was still nominally in charge. Things were done in his name until the morning of the 6th when Chief Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem was sworn in to replace him. But Moshtaque in fact was a prisoner in Bangababan, held securely in his first floor apartment by Brigadier Khalid Musharraf and Col. Shafat Jamil.

During this time the two coup leaders showed themselves to be indecisive and politically inept. They got hopelessly snarled in the effort of overcoming an obstacle entirely of their own making. This was the absurd attempt to give a semblance of legitimacy to the coup and to their own positions. It was as if they were undertaking an orderly transfer of power when the reality was the opposite. As a coup it was a farcical affair with few comparisons.

After the majors had been sent off to Bangkok on the 3rd, Khalid Musharraf spent the rest of that day and half of the next coaxing Khandaker Moshtaque and General Osmani to appoint him Chief of the Army Staff in place of General Ziaur Rahman who had been arrested. Khalid went through the rigmarole of issuing a Presidential Proclamation enabling the Chief Justice to succeed to the office of President instead of the speaker of the National Assembly, as the Constitution required. Ironically, the Proclamation was signed by Moshtaque who had himself been installed as President three months earlier by the majors' coup. I can't imagine who they were trying to impress by this adherence to mock constitutionality. But in the circumstances the whole thing was utterly ridiculous, totally unnecessary and, ultimately, entirely self-defeating. Khalid should have made public acceptance of the coup his first consideration. It would have saved his life.

Although they had seized the government, Khalid Musharraf and Shafat Jamil showed themselves to be ignorant of the first imperative of power: that might is right and a successful coup is its own authority. They did not need President Moshtaque or General Osmani's say-so for anything. Backed by the guns of Jamil's 46 Infantry Brigade, at that time the dominant force in Dhaka, Khalid could have appointed himself Chief of Army Staff, even President or both. By failing to grasp the leadership with both hands he precipitated his own downfall. For three days people wondered who was in charge—Moshtaque or the coup leaders. The political vacuum that developed was quickly filled by his enemies who smartly turned the tables on him. By the time Khalid got round to explaining the reasons for the coup and its objectives—in a broadcast made by the new President, Justice Sayem, on the evening of the

6th—the situation was beyond recall. Already ignited were the fires of the great Sepoy Mutiny. It would destroy him in a matter of hours and go on to cast a long and terrifying shadow on the country's other military leaders.

Khalid's coup, even more than 20 or so coup attempts and mutinies that plagued Bangladesh between 1975 and 1981, was ineptly planned, short-sighted and pressed with a surprising lack of vigour for a soldier who had such a creditable record during the Liberation War.

When they met in the Chinese restaurant near Dhaka stadium on the 1st November, the conspirators were under pressure to pre-empt action by someone else. The air was thick with rumours about the imminent overthrow of Moshtaque's government. Any number of groups were known to be plotting. The left-wing JSD (Jayto Samajtantrik Dal) and the Sharbohora (proletarian) party were known to be actively forming revolutionary cells among the army jawans preparatory to a bid for power. General Ziaur Rahman, the Chief of Staff, was also the central figure of much gossip concerning another coup. There were freedom fighters, resentful of the elevation of former Pakistani officials to key positions in Moshtaque's government, who were threatening 'corrective' action. At the same time Pakistan-oriented parties wanted a man more pliable than Moshtaque was to promote their designs for a 'New Pakistan'. The word in Dhaka was that something was about to happen. But this time Khalid Musharraf didn't want to be caught napping as he had been the previous August by the majors' coup. So when he told Shafat Jamil and the other officers, 'We must strike now', he was echoing a desperate need for action.

The Chinese restaurant plot therefore was a hasty one and strictly limited in its objectives. Essentially these were to seize the government by taking out the majors and their tanks, peaceably if possible, by force if necessary. Secondly, to simultaneously arrest General Ziaur Rahman and force him into retirement. Once this was accomplished the conspirators thought they would play it by ear. There was some disagreement about what they should do about President Moshtaque. For political reasons Khalid wanted to retain and use him as Rashid had previously tried to do. But Col. Shafat Jamil could not stomach Moshtaque. He insisted that he be replaced by the Chief Justice. After some discussion the decision was left to Khalid. Ultimately on the 3rd of November Khalid asked Moshtaque to stay on as President. When the jail killings were discovered the next day, Khalid had no option but to get rid of him. This seemed to have upset Khalid's plans.

In this context it is noteworthy that at no time during the plotting before it or subsequently did Tajuddin or any of the others of the Jail Four figure in the conspirators' plans for an alternative government. One of the survivors from Khalid's group, who does not wish to be identified, told me in an interview: 'If, as it's been alleged, Khalid wanted to install Tajuddin or any of the other chaps as Head of Government, wouldn't we have gone to the jail to release them immediately after the majors surrendered? If we didn't do so it was for the simple reason that they did not figure at all in our plans. We forgot about them entirely until the forenoon of the 4th when we learned that they had been killed in Dhaka Central Jail 30 hours earlier. Had we wanted Tajuddin and found him dead while trying to rescue him on the 3rd, then neither the majors nor Moshtaque would have survived and the coup would have had a totally different outcome.'

The logic of this argument is indisputable. But it did not help Khalid Musharraf. He got lumped with the odium of attempting a sell-out to India and restoring a Mujibist government in Bangladesh. 'SAMYABAD', the journal

of the JSD, has summed up the conventional history of Khalid's four-day coup: 'When Khalid Musharraf and his faction came to power they immediately engaged themselves in bringing about an increase in Indo-Soviet political dominance over the country. The Awami League and its tail—the parties of the Moni-Muzzafar circle—came out openly and made all efforts to re-establish the image of Sheikh Mujib.' The fact is that it's not what Khalid did but what he failed to do in the face of some adverse circumstances that enabled his opponents to tar him with the Indian brush and so turn public opinion in Bangladesh against him. The overthrow of Moshtaque and Sheikh Mujib's killers, for one, was received with tremendous exultation and gloating in India. The Indian press and official radio outdid each other with the most egregious reports and commentaries about the event. That understandably created misgivings and some alarm in Bangladesh whose people are always chary of the attention of their big neighbour. They began to wonder whether India was behind Khalid's coup. Unfortunately for Khalid this suspicion was fostered by what was happening in the country at that time.

With the ousting of Moshtaque and the majors, jubilant Awami Leaguers, students and pro-Moscow groups who had supported Mujib in the past came out on the streets in large numbers to celebrate. Tuesday, the 4th of November, was observed as 'Mujib Day'. Remembrance meetings were held in the main towns and in the capital, at Dhaka university campus, the Shaheed Minar (Martyrs memorial) and other public places. A number of processions were taken out from different parts of the city to Road No. 32 Dhanmandi where Mujib's house was filled with garlands and flowers. Next day a half-day 'hartal' (business closure) in memory of Tajuddin and his companions shut down the city. 'Namaz-i-Janaza', the public prayers for the dead, were said as the four murdered Awami League leaders were ceremonially laid to rest, three of them in Banani graveyard, Dhaka, in plots adjacent to the unmarked mass grave in which Sheikh Mujib's family lies. Then another mass observance with prayers in Mujib's memory was called for Friday, the 7th. All this gave the impression that the coup heralded the return of Mujibism, when the people had barely got over the nightmare of Sheikh Mujib's prodigality, and the return of the allegedly pro-India Awami League when sentiment against India was running high because of a dispute over the Farakka Dam. What made it all the more damning for Khalid was the public outrage when they discovered that his mother and brother, both staunch Awami Leaguers, had led the main procession to Mujib's house on the 4th. The left-wing JSD and the right-wing Muslim League seized on their presence in the Awami League procession as 'proof' that India was behind Khalid's coup. The charge was hammered home in hundreds of thousands of leaflets, 'shabnamas' (anonymous night letters) and posters that flooded the military cantonments and main cities. The results were devastating.

Col. Shafat Jamil told me later in an interview that Khalid was very upset when he saw the papers that Wednesday morning. Picking up the telephone he asked his mother: 'What have you done? You have been in the procession and your picture is in the paper. For this you may have shortened my days and I may not survive.' According to Jamil, 'Khalid felt this would go against us very much.'

Curiously neither of them did anything to counter it. The coup leaders neither encouraged nor discouraged or dissociated themselves from the Awami League demonstrations. For the first three days when it mattered most they unaccountably remained silent and so let their case go by default. This is all the more surprising in view of the attractive presentation made on their behalf

by the new President, Justice Sayem, in a nationwide broadcast on the evening of the fourth day, i.e. Thursday the 6th of November. Sayem made clear that the new government was 'neutral, non-party and interim'; one dedicated to 'an active foreign policy' which included 'unqualified support' for the Muslim world. Compared to Moshtaque's bombastic pronouncement in similar circumstances three months earlier, Sayem's broadcast was a remarkably prosaic, forthright declaration of intent. It dissociated the armed forces from the killing of Sheikh Mujib. It also promised the return of law and order and a clean and impartial administration. The objectives were so fair and so eloquently stated that General Ziaur Rahman, who succeeded Khalid Musharraf as the new military leader a day later, had no hesitation in adopting them without change for the first year of his rule.

All this was the work of Justice Abusadat Mohammad Sayem, who at 59 was by any standards a remarkable man. He had served as a junior to A. K. Fazlul Huq, the towering Bengali Muslim leader venerated as the 'Lion of Bengal'. After a distinguished practice, Sayem joined the Bench and had risen to become the first Chief Judge of the Bangladesh High Court in January, 1972. A year later when the Supreme Court was created, he became its first Chief Justice. Justice Sayem had been most reluctant to step into Moshtaque's shoes. But once he was persuaded to accept the job in the national interest, he filled the role of President with dedication and sincerity. As Head of the new government President Sayem gave an immense dignity to Khalid's coup. But the appointment and his guiding hand came too late to matter. Before the text of Sayem's broadcast was printed in next morning's newspapers it was overtaken by the Sepoy Mutiny and Khalid himself was dead.

A major consideration for Khalid during his short-lived coup was the improvement of his military position. He didn't feel entirely secure although he controlled the major fighting units in Dhaka. Shafat Jamil's 46 Infantry Brigade consisted of two infantry regiments, the 4th East Bengal which he had raised and was supposed to be personally loyal to him, and the 1st East Bengal. They were a powerful force. But within the same cantonment at that time were two important disaffected units—Farook's Bengal Lancers and Rashid's 2 Field Artillery. Although they had been disarmed, they could be dangerous and needed to be 'blocked' at all times. For this purpose Khalid summoned the 10th and 15th East Bengal regiments from Rangpur where they made up the 72 Infantry Brigade. He had raised both regiments and they had fought under him during the Liberation War as part of 'K (for Khalid) Force'. Now he was depending on these freedom fighters to bolster his strength. The 15th East Bengal commanded by Major Jaffer Imam for unreported reasons failed to reach Dhaka in time. But the 10th East Bengal under Major Nawazish rapidly moved into Sher-i-Bangla Nagar, the new capital area of Dhaka, by the morning of 5th. Col. K. S. Huda, the 72 Infantry Brigade commander who was related to Khalid, also came post-haste to join him in Dhaka.

On the 5th Khalid called a conference of military Formation Commanders to drum up support among the out-station brigades. But neither he nor Shafat Jamil made any attempt to address or to motivate the rest of the officers and the troops in Dhaka. They ignored them completely. In the circumstances this was an inexplicable lapse and it hastened their undoing. Ironically, two of the officers of the 10th East Bengal, on whose support Khalid depended, were responsible for his death during the Sepoy Mutiny.

There is no evidence of foreign-related action by Khalid Musharraf between the 3rd and 7th of November; no attempt to tilt Bangladesh this way or that; certainly nothing even remotely suggesting, as the JSD's 'SAMYABAD' journal

1, 'an increase in Indo-Soviet political dominance over the country'. Only two events concerning foreign countries were recorded during this period. One was a £10,000,000 grant-in-aid agreement with Britain for the supply of industrial spares and raw materials. The other was a US \$30.9 million agreement with Turkey for 49 meter-gauge passenger coaches for the Bangladesh railways. In both cases the agreements were negotiated much earlier and signed by senior officials in Dhaka. The coup leaders had nothing to do with them. It must be noted that in the circumstances the allegation that Khalid Musharraf had sold out to India is also a calumny of President Sayem. But no one has made such a ridiculous suggestion against Sayem.

The sepoy mutiny erupted in Dhaka a little after midnight on the night of the 6th of November. For two days there had been ominous signs of unrest in the Cantonment as sepoys of the Bengal Lancers and 2 Field Artillery watched with mounting anxiety, first the arrest and resignation of General Ziaur Rahman, then the arrest and resignation of President Moshtaque. Before leaving for Bangkok, Farook and Rashid had assured them that they would not be victimised in any way. Now those assurances were wearing thin with the exit of Moshtaque, Zia and General Osmani, the 'Papa Tiger' and Colonel-in-Chief of the Bengal Regiment who had been a reassuring father figure as the President's Defence Adviser. There was no one left to protect them. The troops were now at the mercy of Brigadier Khalid Musharraf and Colonel Shafat Jamil, both well known to be arrogant, harsh disciplinarians. Jamil on several occasions had publicly threatened retribution for Mujib's killing. Now the reckoning had come. The jawans became even more apprehensive when word got around that the 10th and 15th East Bengal were on their way to Dhaka from Rangpur to 'sort them out'.

Playing on the soldiers' perturbation at the same time were thousands of leaflets and posters which descended like confetti on the cantonments and main cities of Bangladesh on the 5th and 6th of November. They were the work of extreme right-wing groups such as the Muslim League, and the left-wing JSD. The former had once been accused of collaborating with the Pakistanis. It had resurfaced under Khandaker Moshtaque and now once more faced the prospect of being suppressed by Khalid Musharraf. The latter, officially banned and with its principal leaders in jail, was operating under the cover of the Biplobi Sainik Sangstha (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation) and the Biplobi Gono Bahini (People's Revolutionary Army). The leaflets from the political right and left had a common theme. In effect it was that Khalid was a traitor, an Indian 'stooge' promoting the return of the hated Mujibism and Baksal.

The JSD appeal went one significant step further. The jawans, it argued, were being used as pawns on the chessboard of power by ambitious senior officers who really had no interest in the plight of the soldiers or the oppressed masses. Calling for a general uprising, the JSD proposed a list of 12 demands. Among them were the ending of the much-abused 'batman' system where soldiers were employed as officers' body-servants; the removal of all differences between officers and men in the matter of uniforms and status; the recruitment of officers from among the jawans rather than from the privileged classes; improved pay and housing; a crackdown on corruption and the release of all political prisoners. Loaded as they were in favour of the military under-dog, the demands found instant favour among the aroused soldiery because they had in the past suffered terribly outside the established military pecking order.

This finely-calculated gambit was the brain-child of a remarkable ex-army

officer. He was Lt. Colonel (retired) Abu Taher who would later be hanged by General Zia but nevertheless became a legend in Bangladesh for his integrity, patriotism and egalitarian concepts of a productive people's army based on the jawan or common soldier. Abu Taher trained as a commando in the USA, first at Fort Benning, Georgia and then at the Special Forces Officer Training Institute, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. As a member of the Special Services Group (SSG), an elite Pakistani para-commando unit, Taher found himself stranded in West Pakistan at the start of the Bangladesh War of Liberation. His first attempt at escaping to join the struggle ended in failure. But in June of that year he managed to cross over to India in the company of two other officers. Like him they went on to carve their names in the history of the Bangladeshis. One was Lt. Colonel Mohammad Ziauddin, a legendary left-wing figure, the first man to publicly condemn Sheikh Mujib in 1972. The other, Mohammad Abul Manzoor, as a major general would be responsible for the assassination of President Zia at Chittagong in May, 1981.

Taher had served with distinction in the Liberation War, losing a leg during an assault on Kamalpur, a river port on the Brahmaputra. In 1972 he was made Adjutant General of the Bangladesh Army, then commander of the 44 Infantry Brigade at Comilla before being forced into retirement along with Col. Ziauddin for publicly airing irreconcilable differences with the establishment about the shape and content of the Bangladesh Army. The two colonels wanted the inherited British pattern replaced by a Chinese-style productive 'People's Army'. Sheikh Mujib and the military establishment would have none of it. Taher was given a civilian job as director in charge of the Dredger Organisation. But he maintained his links with the troops through secret membership of the JSD which was infiltrating the armed forces.

According to A. S. M. Abdur Rab, general secretary of the JSD, Taher formed the Biplobi Sainik Sangstha (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation) in July, 1974, as a 'vaguely socialist and egalitarian study group, not well organised'. But after Khalid's coup 15 months later, 'Taher grasped the opportunity and quickly gave the organisation an organised, activist shape and a pro-people programme linked to the students'. Thus were the jawans made aware that if for a combination of reasons it had become a question of 'them or us', now was the time to rise up against Khalid Musharraf and the officer class.

They did exactly that a little after midnight, i.e. in the early hours of the 7th November. With an infectious spontaneity the jawans began breaking into the 'kots' or armouries and looting sten guns, rifles and all available weapons and ammunition. Then they spread rapidly through Dhaka cantonment chanting 'SEPHAI, SEPHAI, BHAI BHAI. OFFICER DE RAKTA CHAI' (All sepoy's are brothers. We want the blood of officers), and 'SEPHAI, SEPHAI, BHAI BHAI. SUBEDARAR UPPERE OFFICER NAI' (All sepoy's are brothers. We don't want officers above the rank of subedar). Clearly the JSD's call for class conflict was being interpreted literally by the troops as an exhortation to kill their officers. Thus Abu Taher, by cleverly manipulating the sepoy's pre-disposition to mutiny brought on by the fear of victimisation, was able to promote his own revolutionary ideas.

The first to feel the effects of the mutiny were 10 young army officers billeted in the Officers' Mess near the 2 Field Artillery barracks. The 'batman' or body-servant of one of the officers ran down the bedroom corridors shouting 'Run for your lives. The sepoy's are coming to kill you.' Hastily discarding their uniforms for unobtrusive civies, the officers climbed over the back wall and proceeded to wade through the paddy fields behind the Combined Military Hospital. With the help of a villager they ultimately made

the Mirpur Road where they dispersed for safety. One of them was 2nd Lt. Syed Eskander, the younger brother of General Ziaur Rahman's wife, Khalida. Even he wasn't taking any chances.

Khalid Musharraf was given the news of the Sepoy Mutiny in a telephone call to Bangababan from the 4th East Bengal headquarters. Evidently he had anticipated trouble because he had earlier in the day sent his wife and family to a secret hide-out in the city. Accompanied by Shafat Jamil, Khalid had gone to Bangababan around 11.30 pm for a late night meeting with Towab and Commodore Khan. Having switched support from Zia to Khalid at the start of the coup, the Air Force and Navy chiefs were now demanding a major role in the government that was to be sworn in on the morrow by President Sayem. Specifically they wanted equal status with Khalid as Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrators (DCMLAs). The President would be CMLA or Chief Martial Law Administrator, however nominally. Khalid refused their demands. He wanted to control all the forces and be CMLA. They argued acrimoniously for more than an hour until the meeting was abruptly broken up by the report of the mutiny.

Khalid decided to leave Bangababan immediately. Shafat Jamil chose to stay behind. The coup leader drove off in his private car accompanied by Col. Huda, the 72 Infantry Brigade commander, and Lt. Colonel Haider, CO of the 8th East Bengal based in Chittagong who had been visiting him while on leave in Dhaka. They proceeded down the Mirpur Road. The general assumption is that they were trying to escape across the river in the direction of India. Jamil disputes this. He said they were on their way to the 10th East Bengal at Sher-i-Bangla Nagar, the new capital area of Dhaka. Whatever the truth, it was unfortunate for them that the car broke down near the Fatima Nursing Home. Khalid telephoned 10th East Bengal headquarters from the clinic, asking whether they had the situation under control and if it was safe for him to come. He was assured on both counts. The three officers then walked down to Sher-i-Bangla Nagar and spent the night with 10th East Bengal.

Short after breakfast next morning (7th November), some jawans from the Bengal Lancers and 2 Field Artillery came over to urge the 10th East Bengal troops to join the mutiny. The trouble seems to have spread rapidly. A few minutes later Khalid Musharraf and Colonels Huda and Haider were gunned down in the CO's room by two company commanders, Captain Asad and Captain Jalil. It's not clear what prompted them to do this. Some allege at least one of them was directly influenced by Abu Taher. Shafat Jamil, however, said the two captains had developed a 'fear complex'—that things would go against them because they had come all the way from Rangpur to bolster Khalid's strength. So they killed him to clear themselves and to curry favour with the mutineers.

Public opinion in Bangladesh has been unkind to Khalid Musharraf. He was neither the traitor who tried to sell his country as his detractors suggest, nor the hero who attempted to right a grave injustice, as his friends would have it. The evidence suggests that this handsome, mercurial man was merely an ambitious military officer, an unlucky opportunist who, because of his political ineptitude, didn't quite make it.

Farook and Rashid are the most unlikely admirers of Bangladesh military brass. Yet they have paid Khalid a surprisingly fulsome tribute in 'The Road to Freedom', a book published in Dhaka in 1984. Describing Khalid as a 'true patriotic hero', they say he 'became a victim of circumstances while trying to avert the danger to the nation created by the conspirators'. The real con-



spirator, Farook and Rashid claim, was General Ziaur Rahman 'whose attempt to capture power on the night of 2nd November, 1975, was foiled by Khalid Musharraf'. According to the majors, General Zia exploited the misunderstanding created by the presence of Khalid's mother and brother in the Awami League procession and 'so a devilish combination of misfortune and conspiracy brought about the tragic end of a great patriot, General Khalid Musharraf.'

The mutiny spread rapidly in Dhaka.

By 1.00 am the troops had fully taken over the Cantonment. Some fired at random in the air; others milled about excitedly, shouting slogans and searching for officers. A group of jawans led by Havildar Sarwar of the Bengal Lancers, scattered the guard at General Zia's house, ending his four-day detention. Zia, still in his night clothes, was loudly cheered as they carried him on their shoulders to the headquarters of the 2 Field Artillery nearby. The general appeared to be overwhelmed by the sudden turn of events. For long moments he could only shake the outstretched hands of the nameless young men who had rescued him or lightly press the shoulders of those who embraced him in the manner that Muslims do. When fully recovered, one of Zia's first acts was to telephone General Khalil to say: 'I am free. I am okay. There's nothing to worry about. Please inform the American and British and Indian ambassadors.'

General Khalil told me he was thrilled to hear that General Zia was safe. But he could not immediately pass on the information to the foreign missions as requested because he was too busy monitoring the developments. When he finally got round to telephoning the diplomats later in the morning, Khalil discovered that Zia had already been in touch with them.

Zia asked his rescuers to bring him some officers, notably General Mir Shaukat Ali, General Abdur Rahman and Col. Aminul Huq. When the troops ushered them in, Zia embraced each of them. He asked for help in controlling the troops. 'I don't want bloodshed,' he told them. A little later Zia telephoned Col. Shafat Jamil at Bangababan asking him to 'forgive and forget and unite the army'. Jamil, however, would have none of it. 'I was rude to him,' he recalled. 'I said "nothing doing". We'll sort this out in the morning.' Zia hung up without another word. 'I thought our troops would support us,' Jamil added, 'but they didn't because they were not motivated. That's the blunder we made.' A little later about 150 jawans and civilians, the latter Abu Taher's men, stormed into Bangababan without resistance in search of the coup leaders. In trying to escape Shafat Jamil fell and broke a leg and spent the next three months in hospital. But somehow the accident saved his life.

The jawans took over the radio station at 1.30 am, announcing to the night staff on duty that 'Sephai Biplob (sepoy revolution) has begun and will continue under General Ziaur Rahman.' The astonished radio staff didn't quite know how to take it. When they realised that the jawans were not threatening them and that Khalid Musharraf had been defeated, they all joined with the wildly-celebrating troops. Some Lancer tanks, piled high with exuberant soldiers and civilians, showed up in the middle of the city. The sight of these mechanical monsters had always sent people running for their lives. Now crowds filling the streets cheered them on. As the radio continued proclaiming 'Sephai Biplob' and that General Zia had taken over, thousands of people who had at first been alarmed by the firing in the Cantonment, poured into the streets to celebrate. For three days they had believed that India through Khalid Musharraf was threatening their hard-won independence. Now that

the nightmare was over, they hailed the troops as liberators. Everywhere jawans and civilians exchanged salutations, embraced one another, danced in the streets. The night was filled with cries of ALLAH HO AKBAR, BANGLADESH ZINDABAD, SEPHAI BIPLOB ZINDABAD, and GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN ZINDABAD—God is great, Long Live Bangladesh, Long Live the Sepoy Revolution, Long Live General Ziaur Rahman. It seemed that the people were re-living the heady moments of the Bangladesh upsurge in March, 1971. It was a night to remember.

In a short speech over Radio Bangladesh, General Zia announced he had temporarily taken over as Chief Martial Law Administrator. He had done so at the request of the armed forces and because of the situation in the country. He said he would discharge his responsibility to the best of his ability. Zia also called for unity, hard work and dedication to getting the country moving again. He ordered offices, courts, airports and mills—closed since Khalid's coup on the 3rd—to reopen and resume working at once. 'May Allah help us all,' he added.

The brief, emotional appeal, eloquently stated in Bengali and with just the right timing, sent a current of nationalistic fervour surging through the country. Zia, the hero, the man who had proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh at the start of the Liberation War, was once more the man of the hour. No one who heard him broadcast that morning of the Sepoy Mutiny will ever forget the experience. 'I was lying in bed,' an old friend recalled, 'when the radio announcer said "Stand by for General Ziaur Rahman the Chief Martial Law Administrator"'. Then his voice came over—simple, sincere, reassuring. Suddenly the darkness was pushed back and there was hope again for us. I told myself I must go to work today; I must go early and do my bit. I began preparing for the day, all the time crying emotionally to myself. Allah had been Merciful. Allah had indeed answered our prayers.' Thus was Bangladesh born again—its peoples' hopes raised once more, however temporarily.

There is some controversy about how General Zia made his broadcast. Abu Taher and the JSD claim he took Zia to the radio station after responding successfully to a personal appeal from the general to rescue him. This is disputed by some of Zia's associates who were present at 2 Field Artillery headquarters on the morning of the 7th. One of them, a military officer who does not wish to be identified because he is still in the army, told me Abu Taher turned up around 5.30 am. Zia embraced him warmly, just as he had embraced the others before him. They had, after all, been comrades in the Liberation War and subsequently had kept in touch. After exchanging pleasantries, Abu Taher requested and obtained a private word with Zia. But when the retired colonel tried to take Zia to the radio station the other officers 'for security reasons' refused to let him go. Abu Taher was furious. The others, however, had their way. Instead of Zia going there, these officers summoned a recording unit from Radio Bangladesh. My informant insists it was Zia's recorded speech that was broadcast early that Friday morning.

Later Abu Taher wanted Zia to address a meeting of jawans he had called for 10 am at the Shaheed Minar (Martyrs' memorial). Evidently the left-wing retired colonel was hoping that once he had Zia in front of a mass gathering of troops he could conveniently put to him the 12 Demands. At that point Zia would hardly be in a position to refuse them. The demands themselves had by now acquired a crucial new dimension that proposed a radical alteration of the decision-making process in Bangladesh. The new leaflet now proclaimed:



'Our revolution is not for changing the leadership only. This revolution is only for the interest of the poorer class. We have accepted you (Zia) as our leader in this revolution. For that reason you are to express very clearly that you are the leader of the poorer class. And for that you have to change the structure of the armed forces . . . From today onwards the armed forces of the country will build themselves as the protector of the interest of the poorer classes . . .'

To this end the Demands document proposed a system of pyramiding soldiers' councils. A Revolutionary Army Organisation with Revolutionary Soldiers' Cells would be formed in each unit of the army throughout the country. In Dhaka a Central Revolutionary Army Organisation would decide all policies and 'link up' with the revolutionary students, workers, peasants and masses. Most importantly, it was emphasised that General Zia 'should NOT take any decision without first consulting this body'.

Clearly Abu Taher and his group wanted an entirely new system of government. And they were trying to ride General Zia's back to achieve this objective. The gambit had been tried before on a notable previous occasion. In 1971 Bengali student leaders—among them A. S. M. Abdur Rab, now general secretary of the JSD—had transfixed Sheikh Mujib with a public re-assertion of the famous 'Six Points' for Bengali autonomy. They ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. If Col. Abu Taher could now inveigle General Zia, popular new military leader, into public endorsement of the 12 Demands, Bangladesh would be pushed irrevocably into radical, revolutionary channels. Taher did not succeed because other officers at 2 Field Artillery headquarters saw through his game and persuaded Zia to decline the invitation to speak at the meeting of the jawans. Taher thereupon abruptly cancelled the meeting.

He did, however, manage to get Zia along to the radio station in the afternoon. There, in the presence of a room full of excited troops, Taher confronted him with the 12 Demands. Zia diplomatically signed the paper on which they were inscribed. In the circumstances he couldn't have done otherwise. But when invited to broadcast again to the nation, Zia carefully steered clear of any reference to the 12 Demands. Instead he thanked the people for their support, emphasising he remained a soldier and not a member of any political group or party. And he appealed to the troops to return at once to their places of duty.

Taher made one more attempt to get Zia to publicly commit himself to the sepoys' 12 Demands. This was at an 11 am conference Zia had called at 2 Field Artillery headquarters on the 7th to decide on a course of action. Present on that occasion were General Osmani, General Khalil, Towab, Commodore M. H. Khan, Mahboobul Alam Chashi (Secretary to the President) and Abu Taher. Col. Taher's presence was a gesture to the jawans because his followers were the most vocal among the mutineers. Taher in turn was the most vocal at the meeting. The first item on the agenda was who should be President. Moshtaque's time had run out, but Osmani and Chashi pleaded that he should be re-instated. In this they were echoing a substantial public demand. Khandaker Moshtaque, after General Zia, was the most popular figure during the Sepoy Mutiny. A number of troops and civilians were chanting slogans in favour of him being made President. Moshtaque's portrait decorated military vehicles and private cars. A group of jawans had also taken him in the morning to the radio station. When they got there Taher's men, who had astutely controlled it from the start, would not let him broadcast. Now Osmani and Chashi wanted Moshtaque to be made President again 'in the national interest'.

General Khalil and Abu Taher opposed the move. Zia himself had had enough of Moshtaque's slights and intrigue in the previous months. So when he quietly threw his weight behind Justice Sayem, who had been sworn in the day before by Khalid Musharraf, it was quickly decided that Sayem should continue as President.

The meeting didn't go entirely General Zia's way. Earlier in the day he had assumed the role of CMLA. Zia obviously felt it was his by right because he was the designated leader of the counter-coup and head of the Army which was by far the most important of the defence services. Now, however, after they had agreed that Justice Sayem should continue as President, General Khalil sprung a surprise on everyone by insisting that it was inappropriate that anyone should appear to stand above the Head of State. He argued that the President, for reasons of precedence, must also be the CMLA. Put that way General Zia could not very well demur, especially as all but Taher supported Khalil's argument. So President Sayem was made CMLA. General Zia was reduced to the position of Deputy CMLA, a rank he shared with the Air Force and Navy Chiefs. The three of them formed the President's advisory council. Zia swallowed his humiliation, but he never forgave General Khalil for it.

Other matters agreed at the conference were the need to move rapidly towards the restoration of democracy and the release of all political prisoners. The JSD was particularly interested in this last point because its principal office bearers and a large number of party workers were in jail. But when Abu Taher proposed that the conference endorse the sepoys' 12 Demands—he called it 'the programme of the 7th November uprising'—he received not a single gesture of support from any of the others. Taher too would not forget this rebuff in the days to come when the JSD and its Revolutionary Peoples' Army tried to topple Zia.

Troops had also mutinied at Chittagong, Comilla, Jessore and other brigade headquarters. Some came to Dhaka to join the 'Biplob'. There were some tense moments when officers were threatened by their troops. But apart from the murder of Khalid Musharraf and his two companions at Sher-i-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka, there was no significant violence reported anywhere on the 7th. The killing of officers started next day, i.e. from early in the morning of the 8th. At least 12 officers were killed that day. Some were murdered out of grudge; others because they happened to belong to the 'hated officer class'. An Army lady doctor nicknamed 'Cherry' and Major Karim, a dental surgeon, were among the former group. Among the latter were Captain Anwar Hussain and Lt. Mustafizur Rahman who were attending a hockey camp at Dhaka stadium. They were caught by some 'revolutionary' soldiers as they attempted to flee, taken to a spot near the TV station and shot dead. Another officer, Major Azim, was caught and killed at Dhaka airport while boarding a flight to Chittagong.

General Zia blamed the JSD for the killings. In an interview six weeks after the event, Zia told me the JSD had 'tried to destroy the army for its own narrow purposes'. Discipline had been wrecked and, he added confidentially, the country's security was endangered because the army 'had been reduced to only 30 per cent of its officer strength'. The others had 'disappeared'—'a few had been killed; the rest had just run away.'

The killings convinced General Zia and the army commanders that they were now facing a determined attempt by a group of radicals to seize power by turning the spontaneous uprising against Khalid Musharraf into a fully-fledged military insurrection. The JSD in fact made no secret of this intention after the 8th. Once it had supported Khalid's overthrow as the first move in the

step-by-step advancement of the proletarian cause. Now the party called for immediate and uninterrupted revolution. Its national leaders such as A. S. M. Abdur Rab, retired Major M. A. Jalil and Mohammad Shahjehan, who had been released from jail on the 7th, quickly denounced Zia and tried to rally the jawans for class war. A new wave of leaflets and posters flooded the cantonments. This time, under the banner of Col. Abu Taher's Revolutionary Soldiers Organisation the troops were urged to form 'BIPLOBI SAINIK PARISHADS' (revolutionary soldiers' councils) to press the sepoys' 12 Demands. They were also instructed to hold tight to their weapons until their demands were met. Thus the stage was set for a showdown with General Zia.

Army Headquarters in Dhaka Cantonment resembled a mini fortress under siege. Zia and his headquarters staff worked, ate and slept in their offices for almost two weeks. This was not for convenience, but as a matter of necessity. The headquarters, I was told by one of the officers who lived through the ordeal, 'was the only secure place in the country for officers'. Nevertheless apart from Zia, Brigadier (later general) Mir Shaukat Ali, who temporarily took over Khalid's job as CGS, and one or two other officers were still nervous in front of the soldiers and prudently removed all badges of rank from their uniforms. 'This was a measure of prudence,' my informant said. 'It was that sort of situation.'

Security was provided by a hastily-assembled commando group chosen from the 7th, 9th, 11th and 12th East Bengal regiments, all based at Jessore. Each of these units had a specially-trained commando company. Zia brought them together in Dhaka on the 9th to guard and support Army Headquarters while he faced up to the continuing upsurge and JSD threat. It was a courageous effort and, in retrospect, one of the bright moments of the Bangladesh Army. In the capital at that time were four infantry regiments, the Bengal Lancers and 2 Field Artillery. The latter were in an uproar but were not the major threat because their principal weapons—the tanks and the field guns—had been disarmed. The men had only the rifles and other guns they had managed to loot. The infantry was another matter. Zia wasn't immediately aware of how deeply affected were these fighting units and he had no way of disarming them. So he played it cool. He bought time to identify and neutralise the troublemakers by pacifying the troops with non-political sweeteners from their 12 Demands: improved pay, accommodation and kit and the ending of the invidious 'batman' system of body servants. Zia also went on the radio and TV to warn the country against the insidious activities of 'interested quarters'. He re-asserted that both he and the armed forces were 'absolutely neutral'; that the government was non-party and non-political and dedicated to the return of democracy. In many ways the broadcast was an echo of what President Sayem had said on behalf of Khalid Musharraf on the 6th of November.

Zia would not have succeeded were it not for the remarkable character of the Bangladeshis. However volatile their politics and violent their political changes, Bangladeshis are paradoxically middle-of-the-roaders, eschewing extremism in both religion and politics. What else would explain the persistent eclipse of the left or the rejection of Ayatollah fundamentalism of the right whenever it reared its head? Their basic chemistry is constituted in equal measure of burning nationalism, unobtrusive piety in the practice of Islam, and an aggressive sense of equality combined with a penchant for instant outrage when confronted by injustice and wrong-doing in others.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, perhaps better than anyone else, understood these character traits of his people. He was remarkably presentient when he warned

his Baksal party three weeks before he died that '... the cause for alarm nowadays is that the people of Bangladesh react too much ... You make devoted efforts throughout (your) whole life, but if you do one wrong you will perish ... This is the rule of Bangladesh'.

Abu Taher and the JSD failed because they tried to push the Bangladeshis beyond their natural desire. The mistake would cost Taher his life. Once they received their financial demands and Sepoy dignity had been restored by the ending of the 'batman' system, most of the jawans quickly lost interest in 'biplob' or revolution. The Cantonment quietened down. By the 23rd November General Zia was ready to crackdown on the JSD. While he was broadcasting a warning that night—'We shall not allow any more disorder ... We shall not tolerate any more bloodshed ...'—armed police fanned out in the city. Among the first to be arrested were Rab, Jalil, Hasanul Huq Inu and Flight Sergeant Abu Yusuf Khan, Abu Taher's elder brother. Taher himself was arrested next morning from a hide-out in Dhaka University hostel. That effectively ended the great Sepoy Mutiny.

Two days later a dramatic bid was made to rescue Abu Taher and the other JSD leaders. It took the form of an attempt to kidnap and take hostage the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Samar Sen. Six armed JSD 'commandos', two of them Taher's brothers, grabbed Mr. Sen outside his office in the Dhanmandi area of Dhaka. Reacting instantly, the High Commissioner's bodyguards opened fire killing four of the attackers, including one of the brothers, and wounding the other two. In the process Mr. Sen received a bullet wound in the arm. Mercifully for both Bangladesh and India this daft scheme did not have more serious consequences. What India would or would not have done had the kidnap attempt succeeded is a matter of conjecture. The fact remains that the incident convinced many Bangladeshis that Taher and the JSD were a lunatic group of adventurers who had gravely imperilled the country. General Zia took advantage of this feeling in the next few months when he hounded the JSD till an estimated 10,000 of its members were locked up in jail.

Col. Abu Taher was brought to trial on 21st June, 1976, seven months after his arrest, before a specially-constituted military tribunal which sat in Dhaka Central Jail. Charged along with him were 33 others. Among them were the top echelon of the JSD and more than 20 soldiers, some of whom were absconding. It was clear from the start that Taher was the principal accused. He never denied his leadership of the BIPLOBI GONO BAHINI (Revolutionary Peoples' Army) or BIPLOBI SAINIK SANGSTHA (Revolutionary Soldiers' Organisation). By his own admission he had also attempted and failed to change the system of government by a military insurrection. In these circumstances Col. Taher could have been tried—and probably been convicted—by due process before the ordinary courts. But to make sure he hanged, General Zia resorted to what unquestionably was one of the most outrageous judicial farces perpetrated in Bangladesh.

For a start, there was an amazing absurdity about one of the main charges against Taher: the overthrow of the 'duly constituted' government on 7th November, 1975. This, it will be recalled, was Khalid Musharraf's four-day regime which had usurped power from Khandaker Moshtaque; and Moshtaque himself had been installed by the majors after they had killed the President, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. General Zia had ultimately been the principal beneficiary of this chain of assassination, coup and counter-coup. Now, ironically, Zia had brought Taher to trial for the very mutiny that had placed him in power on the 7th of November. Taher was also not given a reasonable op-

portunity to defend himself. The charges were first made known to him on the day the trial started. It was only then that he was allowed access to lawyers. The rest was done with appalling haste, as though Zia was anxious to be done with it as quickly as possible. Taher was sentenced to death on the 17th of July, 1976. His mercy petition to the President was rejected on the 20th. Next morning, the 21st, he was hanged at dawn in Dhaka Central Jail.

It was murder by fiat; a grotesque distortion of the judicial process. No one deserves to die that way, whatever the crime, unless we are all to be stained with the guilt of the injustice. The action shamed General Zia and all those who had a hand in it.

I tried, unsuccessfully, to interview President Sayem about the circumstances in which he so promptly confirmed Abu Taher's death sentence. Sayem was the only one of more than a score of people I interviewed in connection with this book who declined to talk to me. But some idea of his version of the event is given by Zillur Rahman Khan in his book 'Leadership Crisis in Bangladesh'. Zillur Khan, who interviewed Sayem in Dhaka in June, 1981, has recorded: 'At Taher's trial, due process of law was clearly violated by the government to such an extent that Justice Abusadat Sayem, then President of Bangladesh, indicated off the record that he had reservations about the trial's fairness . . . Sayem felt that the government evidence at the trial was insufficient for a death sentence but that Taher had received just punishment because of his treasonous attempt to sacrifice the sovereignty of the country.' After such double-faced reasoning, President Sayem should not feel aggrieved—as he indicated to me on the telephone—about the chicanery and hypocrisy of military leaders and politicians. With such private misgivings he was wrong to confirm Taher's death sentence whatever the pressure from General Zia. It must remain a blot on his otherwise admirable record.

Taher's last moments are poignantly described by his wife, Lutfa, in a letter from Kishorgang dated 18th August, 1976, reproduced in Lifschultz's book 'Bangladesh: the Unfinished Revolution'. It said:

'On the 20th in the evening, Taher was informed that on the 21st early in the morning at 4 o'clock, the death sentence would be carried out. He accepted their news and thanked those who had to deliver the message. And then he took his dinner completely normally. Later the Moulvi (priest) was brought and asked him to seek absolution for his sins. He said "I am not touched by the evils of your society, nor have I ever been. I am pure. You may go now. I wish to sleep". He went to sleep quietly. At 3 o'clock in the night he was woken up. He asked how much time was left. After knowing the time he cleaned his teeth and shaved himself and bathed. All those present came forward to help him. He forbade them to do so, saying "I don't want you to touch my body which is pure". After his bath he told the others to prepare tea and to cut the mangoes we had given him. He himself put on the artificial limb, shoes and trousers. He put on a beautiful shirt, his wrist watch and combed his hair carefully. After that he took tea, mangoes and smoked cigarettes with all those present. Looking at his courage all burst into tears about the death sentence on such a man. He consoled them saying, "Come on, laugh. Why are you so gloomy? I had wanted to make the face of death bloom with smiles. Death cannot defeat me". He was asked whether he had any wish. He said, "In exchange for my death, the peace of the common man". After that Taher asked: "Is there any time left?" They answered a little bit. He said in that case I shall recite a poem to you. He read out a poem about his duty and his feelings. Then he said, "Alright, I

am ready. Go ahead. Do your duty". He went towards the gallows and taking the rope in his own hand he put it around his neck. And he said "Goodbye countrymen. Long live Bangladesh! Long live Revolution!"'

A. S. M. Abdur Rab, the JSD's general secretary who was sentenced to 10 years rigorous imprisonment at the same trial but was released later in an act of clemency, said of Taher's hanging: 'Zia couldn't afford to let Taher live because he was the symbol of the patriotic left jawans and the young, junior officers'. Taher himself saw his death as martyrdom for the cause and embraced it as such. In a short valediction he told his wife and brothers: 'If lives are not sacrificed this way how will the common people be liberated?' Things didn't go the way Abu Taher wanted. But his ghost did haunt Zia for the next five years in more than 20 mutinies, insurrections and attempted coups until Zia was finally brought down in a hail of bullets from the guns of young officers, perhaps equally disenchanted but less imaginative than the volatile, one-legged ex-army colonel.